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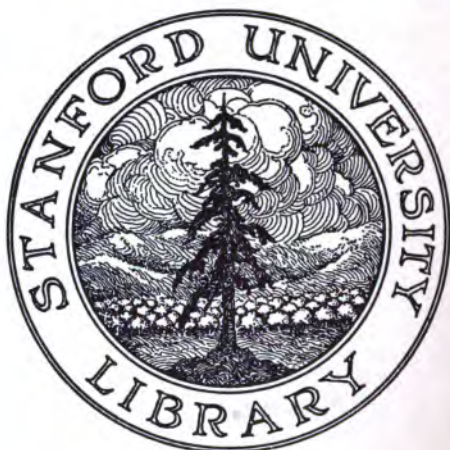
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DOCUMENT

A HUMAN DOCUMENT

A HUMAN DOCUMENT

A NOVEL

BY

W. H. MALLOCK

New Edition

LONDON: CHAPMAN AND HALL, LD.

1892

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A HUMAN DOCUMENT.

INTRODUCTION.

THE following work, though it has the form of a novel, yet for certain singular reasons hardly deserves the name.

I happened to be staying at a country house on the Continent a year or so after the publication of a now celebrated book. That book was the *Journal of Marie Bashkirtcheff*; and as several of the party then present were reading it, it was not unnatural that it should be continually discussed and alluded to. There was one lady, however—a Countess Z——, a Hungarian—whose interest in it struck me as being keener than on ordinary grounds could be accounted for; and whilst sitting with her on a pleasant afternoon in a pavilion by the side of a lake, and talking idly of any triviality that suggested itself, she recurred to the subject so abruptly and with such an air of abstraction, that I felt convinced it was constantly occupying her mind. Her remark was not very striking, and it required no particular answer, so by way of showing her that I was civil enough to be attending, I gave expression to a thought which had often before occurred to me.

“What a pity,” I said, “that a woman like Marie Bashkirtcheff, with such resolute frankness, and such power of self-observation, should have died before her experiences were better worth observing. She often tells us herself that she has nothing in her life to hide. A woman who can say that has not much to reveal. It does not mean merely that she

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has not lived badly—it means also that she has not lived at all.”

My companion fixed her eyes on me with an odd look of inquiry.

“Do you remember this?” I went on. “There is one thing and one thing only which Marie Bashkirtcheff seems to wince at recording; and that thing, she exclaims passionately, sullied her whole life. Do you remember what it was? It was a single kiss on the forehead which she gave to an uninteresting boy. A woman who can think herself sullied by a childish trifle like that knows no more of life than a man can know of partridge-shooting who feels disgraced as a sportsman by a splash of mud on his shoe.”

“Tell me,” said the countess with a slight access of irony, “how deep in the mud must a woman walk before a man considers her progress interesting?”

“He doesn’t want her,” I said, “to walk in the mud at all. When you ask that question you are running away with a word. What he wants her to experience is not the dirt of life, but the depths. The woman we are speaking of had only paddled in the shallows, and she thought herself drowning when a ripple broke over her ankles. I confess I am irritated by this super-sensitive delicacy; and yet, after all, it is that very quality which, if she had ever really lived, would have made her *Journal* such a revelation. I wish,” I went on, as my thoughts more or less ran away with me, “I wish that this woman, with all her moral daintiness, had been swept off her feet by some real and serious passion. I wish that with soul and body she had gone through the storm and fire: that what she had once despised and dreaded had become the desire of her heart; and that she had found herself rejecting, like pieces of idle pedantry, the principles on which once she prided herself as being part of her nature. What an astonishment and what an instruction she would have been to herself during the process! Think how she would have felt each part of it—the degradation, the exaltation, the new weakness, the new strength, the bewilderment, the transfiguration! Could she only have known all this, and have written it down honestly, she then would have given us a human document indeed.”

Countess Z—— remained silent for a moment or two. At last she said, “I am thinking over a practical matter. I

possess a certain something, and I am thinking whether I will show it to you. Tell me," she went on with a laugh, "do you think you would care to see it?"

To this riddle only one answer was possible. "Anything which you think worth showing me I am sure I shall think worth seeing."

"Ah," she replied, "but you will have to do more than see it. This is something which you will have to pore and puzzle over, and if you don't take enough trouble about it to thoroughly try your temper, I shall discover how apathetic you have been, and consider you have abused my confidence. You are perhaps prepared to hear that what I speak about is a collection of manuscripts."

"Are they yours?" I asked.

"Only," she said, "in the sense that they are my property. They were left me by the writer, who died a few months ago. She was a beautiful woman, and you know something about her; but not much, or I can't tell what would have happened to you."

"Go on," I said; "this is indeed interesting."

"If you really meant," she replied, "what you were just now saying, it ought to be far more interesting to you, than you have the least reason to suppose. Shall I tell you what the manuscript is? It is an imaginary continuation of Marie Bashkirtcheff's Journal, in which she is represented as undergoing the exact fate you were wishing for her. I suspect, too," she continued, "that it is something more than that. Indeed, I am certain that it is; but you must read it first, and I will talk it over with you afterwards. If you care to have it, it shall be sent to your room to-night."

Countess Z—— was as good as her word. I was tempted for a moment to think she was even better, when, on going up-stairs to bed, I saw lying on my table, not what I had pictured to myself—a small unpretending packet, which I could have held in my hand, and put with my pocket-handkerchief under my pillow, but a great folio volume bound like a photographic scrap-book, the sight of which filled me with dismay. When, however, I opened it, I was at once reassured and puzzled. It was a scrap-book in reality, not in appearance only; and its bulk was explained by the fact that its leaves were of thick cartridge-paper, and that the manuscript, whose sheets varied in size and appearance, had been

pasted on to these, with a liberal allowance of margin. I realized presently the reason of such an arrangement. The Imaginary Journal, as Countess Z—— had called it, was not entirely a journal, and was not entirely imaginary. I could see, it is true, that some single thread of narrative, in a feminine handwriting, ran through the whole volume; but this was broken by pages after pages of letters, by scraps of poetry, and various other documents, all in the handwriting of a man, and all—as it seemed—originals. “These,” I said to myself, “are fragments of actual life:” and a glance which I took at a few scattered passages was enough to convince me that such was indeed the case. There was no mistaking the matter; for one or two of the letters bore traces of post-marks, which had indented them through their envelopes. My curiosity was so completely roused that I turned to the narrative, which I concluded would explain the whole. I began at the beginning; it was striking eleven when I did so; and I did not close the volume till nearly four in the morning, by which time I had read it through to the end.

It was a singular record, not only on account of its contents, but of the manner in which it seemed to have been composed. The greater part of the narrative was just what I had been led to expect—an imaginary Journal of Marie Bashkirtcheff, during an imaginary continuation of her life. This was written in French; and there was an obvious effort, at first, at reproducing the tone and manner of the original. It was an effort, however, which was not very successful; and the authoress soon abandoned it, or rather forgot to make it. As she did so, she became more and more interesting; until gradually, instead of reading the literary exercise of an amateur, I seemed to be listening to the voice of a living woman who was confessing to me. The very defects of her style, which, though generally clear and straightforward, yet often broke down with a sort of pathetic helplessness, contributed to this illusion. I felt each time this happened, that a woman’s eyes were looking at me, and that her lips, as she spoke, had a deprecating smile on them, or that they trembled. Had she written far better the effect would have been far less vivid. To a critic, no doubt, her triumph would not have seemed a very legitimate one: but I found as I read on, that it became even more complete. The deeper the emotions she had to express, the more crude and fragmentary was the form

in which she attempted to express them ; and the result was that her baffled and crippled sentences, her abrupt transitions, and odd lapses of grammar, though they could hardly be said to constitute a good description of what she professed to have felt, seemed to be more than that :—they seemed to be a visible witness of its reality, as if her language had been broken by it, like a forest broken by a storm, or as if it were some living tissue, wounded and quivering with sensation.

But there were further peculiarities about the narrative, besides those of style. Beginning as it did in the form of a journal, and maintaining for the most part this form throughout, it suddenly assumed at intervals that of an ordinary novel. The writer herself was spoken of in the third person ; scenes were described at which she was not present ; and the unspoken thoughts of a certain man were set forth by her as if he were avowedly a character of her own creation. When I first came upon a passage of this sort its effect naturally was to dispel the impression which had been growing on me, that the imaginary Journal was imaginary in name only. The whole thing at once seemed to be artificial, and instead of interesting fact, to be very childish fiction. Before long, however, I began to make discoveries, by which my original impression was not only restored, but strengthened. I have said that the woman's narrative was broken in many places by the insertion of various documents, evidently written by a man. The first of these was a letter which the imaginary Marie Bashkirtcheff was made to say in her Journal she had received from a particular person. The sentiments expressed, and the events alluded to in it, all fitted completely the situation that had been described by her ; but there was one discrepancy—every proper name was different. According to the Journal the letter came from St. Petersburg ; in reality, it bore the address of a well-known club in Vienna. According to the Journal, the writer was a Russian ; quite another story was betrayed by his clear signature : and all the subsequent documents by the same hand, whether they were letters, or verses, or, as some of them were, mere nondescript fragments, bore to the woman's narrative a relation substantially similar. This, however, is not the whole of the matter. One of the fragments I have mentioned seemed, as I read it, to be familiar to me ; and I asked myself where I could have come across anything like it before. In a moment I recollected. It was

in that very volume; it was in one of those parts of the narrative which were written in the form of a novel. The passage I am referring to described the thoughts of a man as he sat dejected and solitary, looking at a woman's photograph; and I had been surprised at the insight it displayed into the mysteries of the male heart. I now saw that the whole was taken almost literally from a confession which had been made by the very man himself who was in question. Nor did this case stand alone. I continually came afterwards on others of the same kind. Descriptions, conversations, verses, philosophical and literary reflections, and pieces of self-analysis—things like these which occurred in the writings of the man had, I discovered, been incorporated into the writings of the woman, she having changed hardly anything but the names. This change she had carried out consistently.

It may well be imagined that, after only one reading of it, a volume compiled so strangely left me in considerable perplexity; and for half the night I lay considering what was the explanation of it. But the following morning I went through it more carefully; and when, later in the day, I again met Countess Z——, I had come, as I was able to tell her, to a definite conclusion about part of it. So far as it related to the man, the story revealed in it was a true one; that man's life, for some reason or other, had had a special interest for the woman who wrote the Journal; by some means or other she had possessed herself of many of its secrets; and she had conceived the idea of at once describing and hiding it in what, with a reader, should pass for a work of fiction. Farther, she had wavered in her mind as to the form which this work should take—whether it should be that of a fictitious journal or of a novel: for it was evident now to me that the contents of the volume as they stood were merely a rough and experimental copy, interspersed with raw materials, of which as yet she had used part only.

"So much," I said to Countess Z——, "must be plain to any one. That, however, is only one half of the question, and as to the other half, I am altogether in doubt. The man's story is true, but then there is the story of the woman. Is that true also? Or was it merely constructed by the authoress in order to suit the dramatic requirements of the other? I have sometimes inclined to the first view, sometimes to the second. There are certain scenes and feelings described by

her in a way in which a woman could not have described them—I constantly said this—if they had not been part of her own actual life ; and yet, on the other hand, I constantly said also, would any woman, if they had been, have had the courage to describe them ? There is another supposition which once or twice occurred to me, and that is, that though her whole story is true, it is the story not of the authoress but of some other woman, who had revealed it to her. I thought, you see, that though she might have shrunk from describing herself, she might yet have had nerve enough for a *post-mortem* examination of a sister."

"Your supposition is wrong," said Countess Z—— quietly. "It is her own story. She has changed, as you have observed, the names of places and people ; and also a number of other accidental circumstances : but so far as essentials are concerned, she has, to the best of my belief, not written a word that is not absolutely true. In that volume you have her life, and the life of another, turned literally inside out."

"And do you mean to tell me," I exclaimed, "that a woman of position and reputation, a woman too so sensitive as she must have been, and in some ways so extraordinarily innocent, really proposed to publish such a confession about herself, with such a mere pretence of a veil thrown over her own identity ? There are things in that Journal which the most callous woman would hide."

"There is nothing in that Journal," said Countess Z——, "which a callous woman could feel ; and it is the sensitive women, and not the callous ones, for whom confession is sometimes a necessity. The veil, however, which you think so transparent, would really have been thick enough for every practical purpose. This hidden drama of which you have just seen the record, was unsuspected by any one during the life-time of the two chief actors. It is not likely to be suspected, now that they both are dead. The very people who knew them whilst it was in progress, and indeed took unconscious parts in it, would never, from any account of it, be likely to connect it with them, unless persons and localities were mentioned by their actual names : so the changes made by the authoress, slight as you may think them, would have been more than sufficient, supposing her book had been published, to have preserved her secret from even her own acquaintance. And now," Countess Z—— continued, "I will

ask your opinion about this. I have several times wondered during the last few weeks whether some one might not be found who could take the volume in hand and do for my poor friend what she had herself intended to do with it—work up its contents into some presentable form, and publish it. Do you think that a book like that would be found generally interesting?”

“That would depend largely,” I said, “on how it happened to be written. The whole of the materials would have to be recast; for as they stand they are not a story in any literary sense; though they enable us, or rather force us, to construct one out of them for ourselves. But supposing that the story in question were to be told in an adequate way—and by this I mean only one very simple thing: I mean in such a way as to impress the reader with the truth of it—no novel that I have read for years would for me personally have half so much meaning or interest.”

“I have thought,” said Countess Z——, “of writing to our Hungarian novelist J—— and asking him to look at the manuscripts, and see if he could make anything out of them: but I have now got a new project, and you must tell me honestly what you think of it; for it is to make that proposal not to him, but to you. There are several reasons,” she continued, “why, if you care to undertake it, you would be specially suited to the task. The characters, as you have seen, have a certain connection with England; and an Englishman would understand them far better than a Hungarian. There is one reason: here is another. You know Hungary, or at least certain parts of it; and it so happens that some of the places where you stayed are the very places in which some of the incidents of the story happened. But now I am coming to a better reason still. Do you remember that, when you were staying at Schloss S——, you made an expedition to Count D——’s villa, at N——, a house on the slope of a hill, just under a ruined castle?”

“How,” I exclaimed, “could you possibly know that? For it was not—I am certain—one of the things I told you about.”

“No,” she said, “but Countess D—— is my sister. I often stay there; and a little white boudoir, into which I know you went, opening out of the hall, is my own room. You needn’t stare at me as if you thought I was a witch.

My sister and I arrived there the day after your visit. I heard of you from the housekeeper; and in particular I heard this. Of all the pictures—and they are many of them supposed to be interesting—you would look at none but three miniatures in my boudoir—three miniatures in a case, all of the same woman. You couldn't be got away from them."

"This is perfectly true," I said, "I see them distinctly still. The woman had a dress of a different colour in each. There was a brown dress, a purple dress, and a red one with white spots on it. And what did her face mean? Was it guilt, or innocence, or passion, or aspiration? It was a sort of chameleon, and it meant them all by turns. That, at least, is what I thought afterwards. I only felt at the time as if there were some philtre in the ivory."

"That," said Countess Z——, "is the woman who wrote the Journal. It is her life and soul that I am now preparing to commit to you. Ah," she exclaimed, "I have touched you, I see, at last. Do you consent? Will you refuse what I ask you? Come," she went on, "bring down the book into the library. We shall not be disturbed there, and we will look it over together."

I brought it. She turned to something which I had not before noticed—a pocket inside one of the covers, and she extracted from it a piece of thin note-paper. "Look at this," she said. "You have probably not seen it. It is the dedication which the authoress meant to have prefixed to her book; and it will show you how completely you will be fulfilling her wishes if you will only write and publish that book as her proxy."

What she held out to me was merely a few lines. I recognized the hand with which the perusal had made me familiar; but, to my surprise, what I now saw was written not in French but in English, and not in the English of a foreigner. The Countess had called it a "Dedication": the writer herself had given it a different title, which was "Consecration." Then came some words, well known to an English reader, but seeming strange when appropriated here: "To the sole and only begetter of this volume." And then came what follows: "You by whose side I shall lie, in a wicker coffin like yours, with whose bones my bones shall mingle, and whose flesh I shall meet again in the sap of the violets above our grave, I have done my best, whilst waiting

to come back to you in death, to perpetuate in this book neither your life nor mine, but that one single life into which both our lives were fused. Were my power as a writer equal to my love as a woman, that life should live in these pages, as it lived and breathed once in our now lonely bodies. I would make it live—all of it; I would keep back nothing; for perfect love casts out shame. But if any one should think that I ought to blush for what I have written, I should be proud if, in witness of my love for you, every page of it were as crimson as a rose."

When I had finished reading this I found my companion looking at me with an expression of triumph at the interest which was no doubt visible in my face. "I told you," she said, "that you knew something of my authoress; and wasn't I right in adding that if you had known more, I should have been afraid to predict the consequences? Come," she went on, "have I not won my cause? You cannot refuse me now: your heart is in the work already."

"It is," I said. "I confess it. But still I foresee difficulties—some of them specially incident to writing such a book in English. Give me to-day to think the matter over: and to-morrow I will tell you what I can really do."

The difficulties which had first struck me, and which first engaged my attention, were those which, in spite of what Countess Z—— had said, I thought might be experienced in concealing the identity of the characters; and the following day I pointed many cases out to her, where more disguise would be necessary than a mere change of name. On second thoughts she was disposed to admit this; but, on the other hand, she now went on to explain to me a variety of things which the manuscript only imperfectly indicated, such as the position and circumstances of each of the characters mentioned in it, and the precise extent to which the salient facts of the story escaped the notice of the society in the midst of which they occurred. And the result was to convince me that she had been substantially right from the first, and that the book she was anxious I should attempt might, without any imprudence, be so written as to be minutely and literally true, not only in all essentials, but in point even of local colour—indeed that many of the facts would be disguised most completely, if they were taken from the manuscript without any change at all.

That book accordingly is now offered to the reader. As to what the changes are which I have been obliged to make, I cannot say more, or the object of those changes would be defeated. For the method of narration and for the style, indeed, I am myself of course responsible ; but whatever may be thought of this part of the book, and whatever else I may or may not have contributed to it, I can say of it at least one thing with confidence, even if it is not a piece of literature, it is a piece of life : it is genuinely a human document.

And this brings me to a very important point. It is precisely because the book is true in this wide sense that there are certain difficulties, as I said to Countess Z——, specially incident to its being produced in English. In the English fiction of to-day, it is a universal rule that the men, and especially the women, with whom the reader is invited to sympathize, shall always stop short in their relations to one another at a certain point, whatever may be their dispositions and circumstances. It is also a rule equally universal, that any grave transgression of the conventional moral code shall entail on its transgressors some appropriate punishment, or at all events that it shall not end in their happiness. In the present book neither of these rules is observed. The characters violate the first ; their history violates the second ; and the reason is that this book is true to life, whilst to a great part of life the rules are absolutely untrue. The fact remains, however, that in this country these rules supply to a numerous class of readers a sort of moral standard by which all fiction is judged ; and the book is consequently one to which many people may raise objections. I think it best to admit this fact plainly, and to state, in a brief and general way, how I should answer such objections myself, supposing them to be really raised. I should not consider it a sufficient answer to say that every detail mentioned in it was taken from actual life ; for it is quite possible so to select such details, as to misrepresent the life of which they formed a part, and to convey a false idea of human nature generally. This, in my judgment, is precisely what is done by M. Zola. His fault is not that he exhibits the operation of certain passions, which our English novelists forbear altogether to deal with. It is that he represents those passions as covering a larger field than they do ; and that the other elements of life, which are of at least equal importance, are dwarfed by this treatment

into a grotesquely false insignificance. This is not the fault, however, of such writers as M. Zola only. It is the fault of writers such as Miss Yonge also, and if we try both by the same severe standard, *The Daisy Chain* must be condemned for the same reason as *Nana*. Neither are true to life, for each excludes one half of it. No doubt *The Daisy Chain* has this point in its favour—that it is, as it was meant to be, a good book for children, whereas a book like *Nana* is a good book for nobody. But what is good for children is useless for men and women, who differ from children mainly in their inevitable experience of so much that we shelter childhood from even hearing of prematurely. To men and women, who are capable of observation and reflection, and who are neither depraved nor abnormally innocent, life is essentially a combination of widely different elements. Whatever may be our definition of good or evil, and however remote as an abstraction the one may be from the other, we see that as realities they are everywhere in the closest contact, sometimes fretting each other, sometimes apparently united, not only in the same society, but in the same people and in the same motives and actions: and the interest of life depends upon neither separately, but on the constant and ever-changing relations between the two; the evil losing its meaning when considered apart from the good, and the good losing its meaning when considered apart from the evil. Hence it follows—and surely nobody can dispute the fact—that any picture of the one must be misleading and incomplete, unless it is part of a picture equally complete of the other. Now my case on behalf of the present book is this—that it presents us with a picture equally complete of both; and that its various details are not only true individually, but form collectively a true representation of life.

It may, however, still be urged by some that I have not so much as touched upon the important question yet. The important question, they may say, is not whether the book is true, but whether it is moral. My answer would be this—that if it is true in the sense I have just described, it is as moral or as immoral as life is, neither more nor less. If it is immoral to show, as actual life shows, that the hard and fast division between good and evil, which undoubtedly exists in the region of abstract theory, and which for certain purposes it is undoubtedly necessary that we should recognize, does not

exist in the lives of average men and women; and farther, what is still more important, that good and evil fortune do not follow, in any invariable way, on what moralists classify as good and evil conduct, but are constantly apportioned, without any apparent reference to the conventional requirements of retributive moral justice; if it is immoral to show all this, then it must be admitted that this book is immoral. But in that case we must make another admission also—that life is immoral in precisely the same sense; that whilst moralists teach one thing, it teaches another, and that no picture of it is fit for good people to look at, in which half of its distinctive features have not been suppressed or altered.

If any one takes this view of the case, I cannot, here at least, attempt to argue him out of it. I must content myself with saying that the view is not mine, and that I hold to the opposite, and, indeed, the only other alternative. I believe that morality is only worth inculcating because, and in so far as, its motives, rules, and sanctions correspond to the realities of life considered in its entirety. I believe, therefore, that any picture of life, if only complete so far as its subject goes, will be sure to convey some moral or other, though what that moral is may vary with the minds that look for it. It will in any case be sounder than any that could be conveyed by illustrations manipulated for the special purpose of conveying it; and a complete autobiography of the conscience of a single profligate, were such a thing possible, would teach us more than a dozen descriptions of the selected pieties of saints. How far such teachings would, in their practical tendency, correspond with those which are conventionally called moral in this country is doubtful. Sometimes the correspondence between the two would be complete and striking; but sometimes the former would certainly contradict the latter, if not in their most important, at all events in their tenderest, points. This must be admitted as a general truth; but readers of the present book, which is all that we are here concerned with, if affronted by finding in it anything not moral in the conventional sense, will at all events be comforted by finding under the surface much that would coincide with the morals of the most conventional sermon. If they are scandalized by being shown that people who have many undoubted virtues can yet deliberately commit certain offences, they may learn a sharp and salutary lesson in charity by being shown that people

whom they would curtly classify as offenders may yet have virtues which perhaps in themselves are wanting. If they see consciences easy which they think ought to be troubled, they will see consciences troubled which superficially seem easy. They will see, in short, what ought to edify them more than anything, even if it does not happen to do so, that the sense of virtue and the practice of right conduct are far from being the monopoly of those who are technically virtuous. Finally, if the book is complained of because people who are not technically virtuous are shown in it to have been ultimately happy, as such people often are, I would point out that their happiness, such as it is, results from qualities in them which every one must admire, and not from those of their actions, which perhaps most people will condemn.

CHAPTER I.

ONE spring afternoon of the year 18—, the departure side of the Gare de Strasbourg at Paris was occupied by a passenger train of somewhat unusual aspect. It was composed of long carriages, which were entered and connected together by covered balconies projecting at the ends of each. Within, through rows of windows, a narrow passage was visible, from which opened a series of small compartments, whilst the foremost carriage was a species of gilt restaurant, filled with small dinner-tables, and already gleaming with table-cloths. This was the Orient Express, about to start for Constantinople. It being a train which in all carried but sixty passengers, each with a berth booked and reserved beforehand, there was on the platform little bustle or crowding. Trucks piled with luggage were being wheeled slowly to the van; and the owners were most of them saying good-bye to friends, or being shown their places by conductors in snuff-coloured livery. Their aspect, generally, was opulent, without being distinguished. There were men—Jews and Germans—who looked liked successful merchants, with fat stomachs, and hands with heavy rings on them. There were French and German ladies of vague conditions in life, who had an air as if

they expected to be sea-sick, and seemed dirty and pale already with the mere anticipations of their journey; and amongst them all were an Austrian count and countess, he examining his fellow-travellers with a smile of curious superiority, she with a look of quiet, refined distress, tempered by aristocratic resignation.

There was also another curious spectator, who had evidently completed all his preliminary arrangements, and standing on one of the balconies was placidly contemplating the scene. He was a dark man, with dark, almond-shaped eyes, which, assisted by his moustache and teeth, kept a chronic smile shining; whilst the curled brim of his hat, the startling pattern of his clothes, his lavender gloves, and a large gold-headed cane, loudly besought the world to recognize and respect him as a *viveur*. He had, indeed, at the moment another and still higher claim to the character; for he was engaged in what was apparently a farewell conversation with a lady, beautifully but somewhat extravagantly dressed, who was one of the best known, though hardly the freshest, of the flowers of the Parisian *demi-monde*. Neither of the two seemed saddened by the thought of separation, but rather to be rejoicing in the consciousness of a highly satisfactory past; and their happy laughter, as they commented on the people round them, was tempered solely by a glance or two of ostentatious tenderness. Only once was the man's good-humour ruffled, and this was by a porter, who, entering the carriage with a bag, slightly jostled him, and trod accidentally on his toe. The smile in an instant became a vindictive grin, and a string of imprecations, some in French, some in English, shot from his mouth, softly but with extraordinary vigour.

"*Doucement ! doucement !*" said the lady, in a metallic undertone of remonstrance. "You know, *mon ami*, yours is a nasty little devil of a temper; and all I can say is, I'm thankful I'm not your wife."

"And so am I, *chérie*," laughed the man, who had instantly recovered himself, his smile coming back with such an impetus that it took the form of a leer. "Look, look!" he continued, "here is some swell, and no mistake. Did you see what a bow the *chef de gare* made to him? And that man with him, carrying a despatch-box, belongs to the British Embassy. I've seen him sometimes getting luggage passed at the *douane*."

The lady, having studied the new-comer, flashed a glance on

her companion, from eyes that gleamed like a couple of sunlit window-panes, and said—"Are you getting jealous? I've taken a fancy to him already."

"Have you, darling?" replied the other. "It's a pity you're just too late. However, at all events, you can enjoy a good long look at him. Don't you see? They're coming to this carriage."

He stepped down from the balcony, and, resting his hand upon her arm, remained with her watching the group that was now approaching.

"This way, monsieur," said an official, full of importance. "The compartment reserved for you is at the far end of the passage. *Numéros quinze et dix-huit*," he went on, to a valet and railway-porter, whom he ordered to enter first, with monsieur's various properties, including the despatch-box, which already had roused attention.

"Ah," said the lady, "I heard him speak. He's an Englishman. You, my friend, would claim him as a compatriot; though your eyes and your name—myself I think both beautiful—would prevent this insular aristocrat from paying you back the compliment."

At this the gentleman made a little cluck with his tongue, as if rendering a tribute to the lady's delicate wit.

"St!" he said presently, "here your aristocrat comes again. He looks about him as if no one were worth considering. You know the English phrase, that *a man gives himself airs*. There's a man who exactly shows its meaning."

"Don't tell me," replied the lady, "what a man means by his looks. This man means one of two things, or very probably both—that he thinks, *chéri*, very little of you; or that he's thinking a great deal about something or somebody else. Ah! *Mon Dieu!*—but see! something has roused him now."

The person who was the subject of all these observations, and who partly justified the tenor of them by a look of distinct good-breeding, together with an obvious inattention to the whole public about him, at this moment suddenly fixed his eyes on a fresh arrival visible at some little distance. This was a man, round-faced and fair-bearded, not distinguished-looking in the social sense of the word, indeed dressed in a way impossible in the world of fashion; but still bearing something in his aspect refined and suggesting intellect. What, however, had caught the attention of the Englishman, was not his

intellect or refinement, but the fact that he appeared to be crippled, and, with no other assistance than that of a laden porter, to experience considerable difficulty in getting across the platform. The Englishman's face, as he realized this, softened; a look for a moment flickered on it of irresolute shyness; and then moving forward, and raising his hat to the sufferer, offered him the help of an arm with an air of such spontaneous kindness, that the eyes of the other, in accepting it, looked an almost disproportionate gratitude. It appeared that both had places in the same carriage; so the lady and her dark-eyed friend had the pleasure of watching them as they entered.

"The lame one's a German doctor," said the latter of these keen critics. "I saw his name on a label. If the loss of you makes me ill, ducky, I shall go to him for a bottle of medicine. Ah—*sapristi!*—in three minutes we're starting. Come inside for a second—there's no one in my compartment—just to tell me that your heart is broken at leaving me."

He entered the carriage; the lady lightly followed him, filling the narrow passage with a rustle of scented silks. Presently from one of the compartments the sound of a kiss was audible. Silk skirts again rustled towards the balcony, leaving behind them the air heavy with patchouli. The lover followed: a conductor with ironical deference said, "It is time for *Madame la Comtesse* to descend." The lady from the platform kissed her hand to the lover; the lover from the balcony kissed his hand to the lady; and then as the train slowly got into motion, with an air of jaunty triumph, he retired into the interior of the carriage.

The Englishman, meanwhile, had been helping the doctor to settle himself. The latter, however, was unfortunate. The compartment in which his place was allotted to him had three other occupants, and it was impossible for him to lie down, or even to lie back, comfortably. Of this the Englishman almost at once took note.

"My dear sir," he said, "my own compartment is empty; you will be much better off if you will do me the honour of sharing it with me."

The doctor, who was just seated, looked up surprised, and with thanks, which hesitated from their sincerity, accepted the invitation. His things were quickly seized on and removed by the benevolent stranger, who then offered him an arm, and conducted him to his new quarters; and here, with the aid of

various rugs and cushions, he was presently enjoying a position suitable to his crippled state.

"If," said the Englishman, "I might venture on a piece of advice to you, it would be, that you should sleep for an hour or so. You look tired and exhausted. I am going myself to smoke in another part of the train; and by and by I shall be back again, and see how you are getting on. I assure you," he added, checking the acknowledgments of the doctor, who gave him a glance like that of a grateful dog, "I am putting myself to no sort of inconvenience. I will shut the door, so as to leave you perfectly quiet; and as the compartment is reserved for me, no one else can disturb you."

These last words of the Englishman, spoken as he was in the act of going, brought a new expression, for a moment, into the doctor's face. It was an expression denoting that peculiar composite feeling—partly curiosity, partly surprised deference—which a man experiences, who having been talking familiarly to another, begins to suspect in him some unknown superiority or importance.

"Who," thought the doctor, "can this be, who travels *en prince* in this way?" And his eyes, before he closed them, rested in sleepy wonder on a handsome dressing-bag, stamped with gold initials, and a label with some writing on it, a part of which he fancied was "British Embassy."

The Englishman was clearly unconscious of the impression he had thus produced: indeed, no sooner was he outside the door, than his thoughts were turned for the time from the doctor altogether.

"That gentleman seems to be very ill."

Such was the observation with which he was instantly greeted in the passage. He looked at the speaker with a certain feeling of surprise, and recollected the fact, which at the time he had hardly noticed, of having seen him with an over-dressed female, standing on the Paris platform. This was, indeed, the lover who had so lately been separated from his mistress. He spoke in English—an English that was not fluent only, it was glib; but in his accent, just as in his appearance, there was something distinctly foreign. The Englishman's first impulse was to answer him somewhat coldly; but the eyes of the lover seemed so brimming with a wish to please—a wish to please even at the expense of cringing—whilst his attitude as he lounged against the side of the

passage, smoking, had somehow so much the effect of an apologetic ingratiating bow, that they secured for him a reception civil if not effusive.

"I have left the invalid alone, in order that he may be able to sleep a little," the Englishman said, as he took out his cigar-case. He opened it, and found it empty.

"Have one of mine," said the lover, as he produced his own—a gorgeous product of Vienna—and offered it distended to the Englishman. "Don't disturb the sick man by going to look for yours. You will," he went on confidentially, "find these are very choice."

Bowing slightly, the Englishman accepted the offer. With his gloved hands the lover struck a light for him; and the Englishman, with obvious sincerity, acknowledged, after the first puff, that the cigar was of the rarest excellence.

"Yes," said the lover, doing something with his eyes like winking, "I rather fancy myself on my cigars. Pah! This passage is draughty. What do you say to smoking in my compartment?"

The Englishman assented. His new acquaintance was a puzzle to him—exciting in him a certain feeling of contempt, but also at the same time one of curiosity and amusement.

"Whenever," said the lover as he seated himself, "this train is not quite full, I always, if I wish it, get a compartment to myself. I know one of the Directors of the *Wagons-lits* Company—I've a friend at court—and—there's the beauty of it—I don't pay a farthing extra."

The Englishman's eye was caught by a bouquet on the seat beside him.

"The Directors, I see," he said, "supply you with flowers also."

"No," laughed the lover, his face bright with knowingness, "not quite so good as that. These flowers were left here by a lady. I dare say you saw her at the station. I'll tell you who she was. That lady was the great Fanny Harvard. You have heard of her?"

The Englishman admitted that he had; but he did so coldly and drily, and involuntarily drew back in a way which to any impartial observer would have betrayed the displeased astonishment with which he received such confidences. His whole bearing and look seemed to be saying, "Who on earth is this extraordinary animal!" His companion, however, was con-

scious of no rebuff ; but, opening a bag of scented Russian leather, produced a photograph of a lady with bare shoulders, and smilingly handing it to the Englishman, said to him—"That's her last."

The Englishman looked at it ; he hardly could do less ; and a change, as he did so, slowly stole over his face. His mood seemed to be reverting from one of frigid disgust to what it had been before—one of curious cynical amusement. And indeed so far as amusement and curiosity went, he found himself presently not being ill repaid. His companion at first was constant to the subject of the fair sex, with whom, he seemed anxious to let it be known, he had, in various capitals, a wide and victorious acquaintance. He accidentally let it transpire that he was married, and the father of a family ; but this admission did nothing to check his complacent candour. It happened, however, that in searching his bag for some portraits which should illustrate the type of the female figure in Warsaw, he came across a picture of a completely different character ; and this, to the Englishman's extreme relief, turned his conversation into a new channel. The picture was a photograph of a race-horse.

"Ah," he said, "look at that. Don't you call that splendid ? That's a photograph of the grand old horse Warrior."

Of this animal he explained that he was himself the fortunate owner, and that it had lately done wonders on some new race-course in Sussex. Then he enumerated certain remarkable instances of his astuteness and success in betting ; he talked discursively of trainers, jockeys, and horseflesh ; and his knowledge of these subjects, such as it was, was not confined to England, but extended to the Continent also. His range of topics, as he proceeded, widened like circles on water ; and before long it included dogs, cards, and billiards. Then came a surprise. The Englishman asked some question with regard to the train they were travelling by, and his companion's answers, which overflowed with ready information, showed an intimate acquaintance with the management of the chief railways in Europe, and also a certain insight into the politics and commercial condition of various European countries, and of much of Asiatic Turkey. By and by they happened to show something more. They showed what seemed to be a certain knowledge of Art. The Englishman at first was surprised at this revelation ; but pursuing the subject, he was amused to

discern gradually, that what at first he had taken to be a feeling for art itself, was rather a sense, almost monkeyish in its instinctive quickness, of the price which, under various circumstances, works of art might fetch.

"I can assure you," said the lover at last, in a tone of confidential pride, "my house in England is crowded with *objets d'art*. My whole collection has changed twice over since I married; and each time I've made thirty per cent. on what I paid for it. Listen—shall I tell you one little good story? I gave my wife, when I married, some splendid antique jewellery—in Paris I got it—which cost me three thousand pounds. We sold two-thirds of it for three thousand eight hundred; I gave her what was modern, and looked every bit as smart, and I had at the end a good twelve hundred in my pocket."

"And did you," asked the Englishman, drily, "make her some more profitable presents with it?"

"Ah," said the lover, "that's telling!" He smiled complacently for a moment, and then exclaimed, "I wish you could have seen one thing—a necklace which I gave to a certain fair *danseuse* in Vienna. I got that at Paris too. It once was Madame du Barry's."

The allusion to womanhood was fatal. The lover was like Anacreon. To whatever tune he might strike his conversational lyre, the notes seemed to become what might be called by a euphemism, amatory; and a new series of tender and successful experiences were now, with cheerful volubility, poured into the Englishman's ears, who listened to them for a time with a certain apathetic patience. The patience was mainly due to a singular characteristic in the speaker. In his look and manner there was such a complete absence of shame, that though the substance of his conversation was vulgar and even brutal in its profligacy, it had to the physical ear the most innocent and ingenuous sound. He laughed over his most repulsive anecdotes as a schoolboy might laugh over his peg-top; and his grossest comments on what he called "The points of a woman," might, so far as the mere sound of them went, have been a harmless remark on the colour of a flower or a butterfly. The Englishman at first, therefore, did but partially realize the nature of the intellectual treat that was thus so frankly offered him. It is enough to say that most of it is not fit to repeat. The Englishman presently found it was not fit to listen to. He was a man whose face, whatever

might be his general character, showed one thing at least in his favour—that he was not gross like his companion. A frown, which his companion entirely failed to notice, gathered gradually on his forehead; his short utterances became shorter and more distant; and before long he rose, and coldly, but with perfect civility, said he must be going back to look after the invalided doctor. The lover with perfect good-humour expressed his smiling sorrow, and rising also, bowed the Englishman into the passage. There, catching sight of a feminine figure, which was apparently in the act of passing to the adjoining carriage, his appreciation of beauty was at once touched by its outlines, and smiling at the Englishman, like one augur at another, he sidled off in pursuit of it. The Englishman with a sigh of relief found himself in his own compartment.

The doctor was awake, refreshed, and in obvious comfort. He was just beginning to glance at a French novel, and one or two others were lying on a little table beside him. The Englishman noticed their titles, and noticed them not with pleasure. "Has no one," he said to himself, "even a tolerably clear mind?"

The doctor had dropped his book; and his expression, as he turned to the Englishman, seemed to meet the unspoken question, frankly answering, "I have."

"These books," he said, "were lent me by a friend of mine—a medical student—to amuse me during my journey. Our ideas of what is amusing, or even readable, I think must be somewhat different."

Full of a sense of disgust at his late companion, the Englishman was delighted by the doctor's contemptuous tone, and replied that though he knew something of the books in question himself, he knew only enough to make him thankful he knew no more. "If," he added, "I may indulge my temper in a paradox, I should say that a dirty reader was worse than a dirty liver."

"I," said the doctor, "have thought little about literature, but I follow a profession which forces me to think much about life; and I would venture to make the following literary criticism. Books like these, which seem to revolt both of us, are bad both artistically and morally, for one simple physiological reason. If a book is to interest, it must excite sympathy; and human nature happens to be physiologically

such, that those sympathies which Christians were accustomed to call our lowest, are those which respond most readily to the least skilful literary stimulus. It is a sign therefore of weak art to appeal to them, since they are excited so easily ; and it is bad morality to appeal to them, since they are excited so unmanageably."

"Yes," said the Englishman, "and it also is bad science ; since it is difficult to appeal to them, in any picture of life, without exciting them disproportionately to the real importance of their subject."

"Consider !" exclaimed the doctor. "If the emotion of hatred and the appetite of thirst were roused by words as easily as what Frenchmen call *l'amour*, books would be depraved and depraving which we now think moral as sermons. The novel of drunkenness would be as indecent as the novel of profligacy. Mein Gott !" he continued, "and in Paris it would be as popular. However, to do the Parisians justice, I fully admit the truth of what you observed just now—that their sensual novels make passion fill more of life than it really does. But this brings us to quite a different point. This, as you observed, is merely an error in science ; and," said the doctor, with a mild smile in his eyes, "it is not confined to novels written in Paris. Your English novels of sentiment embody the same error as to love. They give it an importance which it does not possess in life."

The Englishman leaned back, with a low laugh of approbation. "Yes," he exclaimed, "you are perfectly right there. In some lives, no doubt, love may be the principal thing ; but not in lives generally, and certainly not in the healthiest lives. Money-making, ambition, the mere pleasure of successful action, the placid affections of the family, amusement, a sense of humour, and even material comfort—these for most men form the real landscape of happiness. Love is little more than some fleeting effect of sunshine."

"You," said the doctor, laying his hand on his crippled leg, "speak of the landscape of happiness as if that for most men composed the whole landscape of existence. But for most men it is composed of anxiety and disappointment also. I, for instance, have a wife and family who depend on me. I once had some money of my own, but it has been lost in a financial earthquake. For the last three months an accident has made me useless ; and though now I have secured a

practice in a small but rising watering-place, life for me at present is a landscape of fear and struggle."

"And," said the Englishman, "surely of hope also."

"Bah!" said the doctor, rousing himself, "I spoke like a fool. I have hope as well as fear—to be sure I have. I have hard work before me, but I have something worth working for. Again, as a man of science, I take the keenest interest in my profession; whilst I am also enough of an egotist to be tickled by some ambition. Do you see that?" he said, pointing to a leather case. "It contains a new apparatus connected with the operation of tracheotomy—my own invention. My special subject of study has been the affections of the throat. May I venture to ask what walk in life is yours?"

The Englishman for a single moment drew himself up, and his expression chilled into one of involuntary *hariteur*. But the question, blunt as it was, was yet put so guilelessly, that in another moment he softened, and answered with complete good-nature—

"I flatter myself that I serve, or am going to serve, my country. I don't mean with my sword," he added; "I am not like you—a tracheotomist."

Both men laughed. The Englishman turned to the window, and as if to change the conversation pointed to the sun, which was setting under clouds coloured like heather.

"Beautiful!" murmured the doctor in a tone of genuine feeling. "Beautiful! To me," he went on, looking the Englishman in the face, "the deepest interest of medicine lies not in medicine but in man. A doctor can hardly help being more than half a philosopher; and even though he may be a materialist, more than half a divine. If we identify soul with body, that to us does but bring soul nearer. My thoughts have strayed back to what we were just now talking of. We were saying that the influence of love in life is exaggerated; but let us consider this. Why do you and I feel that sunset to be beautiful? Because of the same something in it of which love is one manifestation, and of which religion, or all longing for what is more than human, is another."

"Let us hope," said the Englishman, "that man's belief in the object of his religion is more accurate than his belief in many of the objects of his love."

"In the present day," replied the doctor, "religion is a

belief no longer. It is only the raw material out of which some new belief will be fashioned. I hope I do not offend you. Perhaps I am speaking to a Catholic?"

"You are not," said the Englishman; "though Catholicism is the only religion that is logical."

"Yes," said the doctor, "and my reading of life as a materialist, is that our higher life can be lived only in defiance of logic. All forms of Christianity affect to explain too much. A belief which pretends to have no difficulties is a belief that solves none."

"And do you," said the Englishman, "as a materialist, consider a belief necessary? And what belief in the future do you think the world will accept?"

"That," the doctor answered, "the future alone can show. In the present state of knowledge, religion cannot express itself in any definite form which knowledge will allow us to tolerate. How will knowledge allow us to define God? Merely as the echo of man's soul from the universe—a whisper which we impute to the stars. All the same, I still maintain this—that man is only human because of his longing for what is more than human. There, sir, you have my creed."

"Yes," said the Englishman, "and I think you have mine also; only we are apt under its influence sometimes to find this—that life has lost all its hopes, and death none of its terrors. However, we are not peculiar. I have talked with the leaders of science in my own country"—and he here mentioned names of European celebrity—"and though many of them were shy of making distinct admissions, at the back of their minds I believe that they felt as I did. You look surprised at my having any scientific acquaintances."

The doctor hesitated.

"The plain fact is," he replied, "if I may be excused for saying so, that you seem like a man of affairs, and like a man of fashion; and such men as a rule care little for men of science."

The Englishman's face for a moment betrayed a feeling shared by many others, and somewhat difficult to explain. It showed that this speech pleased him, as though it were a kind of compliment. But the feeling vanished, and his look was again thoughtful.

"Well," the doctor continued, "and if our religion be such,

I think we are bound to admit that love, and the ideas attached to it, play a more important part in life than we just now were admitting. The creeds of man's various civilizations have influenced his emotional development, but primarily they have been moulded by it; and what men believe about another life, depends largely on what their instincts prompt them to do in this. Now I haven't shocked you thus far—but perhaps I shall shock you now. The position of woman, in all countries, is changing. Her claims to some life of her own are growing and becoming recognized as they never were before; and love, whatever limits we may assign to its influence, is, with the cultivated woman of the modern world, the expression of her highest life, when it does not happen to be the denial of it. When it is not a blasphemy, it is a religion. One of the chief changes then awaiting modern society, is some change in the present institution of marriage. It will not be a change in the direction of what is commonly called license, but in that of the ideal which the Christian marriage aims at, and which so often it so ludicrously fails to reach; but all the same it will be a change which, more than any other, will be opposed by Christian theology, and consequently instrumental in destroying it."

The Englishman laughed.

"You have not shocked me," he said, "but you have not convinced me. In my views of marriage I fear I am hopelessly conservative."

"Well," replied the doctor, "it requires more of the martyr's courage to live in a new way than to believe in a new way. My own marriage, I should mention, has been completely happy, so that I am no candidate for any social martyrdom myself."

"I could show you," said the Englishman, "a man in this train who is; and who is so devoted to his own way of living and loving, that he'll lay down his health for it, if he doesn't lay down his life."

He had hardly finished his sentence, when the door of the compartment opened, and the lover's face peeped in, wreathed in apologetic smiles.

"Mr. Grenville," he said—"forgive me for calling you by your name—the conductor told it to me—I came to tell you that there is dinner in half an hour. I have already secured a table. Perhaps you and this gentleman will share it with me."

So civil an invitation it was not possible to refuse.

"That's the martyr," said the Englishman, as soon as the lover had departed. "When you meet him at dinner he will give you his confession of faith."

The doctor found presently, from his experience in the restaurant, that this prophecy was strictly true. The lover, who had ordered a magnum of the best champagne, and generously insisted on standing treat to his companions, excelled himself under the influence of the grape, and was more like Anacreon than ever, though he startled the doctor with a number of questions and confidences which had more connection with the province of *Æsculapius* than of the *Muses*.

The doctor, like the Englishman, was entertained as well as disgusted. The disgust of the latter indeed was presently quite lost in a sense of humour. He happened to be taking a time-table from his pocket, and accidentally he put on the cloth along with it a small photograph of an ancient English manor-house. The lover instantly exclaimed, "How magnificent! How charming!" and spoke with fervour of the beauty of country seats in England.

The Englishman wondered at his showing so much feeling, but the next moment discovered that it was due to the following fact. The lover had found such houses excellent things to gamble in. In three cases—those of three financial magnates—he had learnt that they were anxious to establish themselves in certain parts of the country. He had adroitly stepped in and bought houses at a bargain, which he resold at a profit to the opulent persons in question.

"One house," he said, "was a Tudor castle; and I got more for it from the fact that its roof was rotten, than I should have got had I spent two thousand pounds in renewing it. Eh, Mr. Grenville—that's the way the world wags!"

Suddenly without rhyme or reason there succeeded to this a string of tremendous oaths. The doctor and the Englishman both stared at the lover; every muscle of his face was rigid with intense vindictiveness, and the object of this was a waiter, who had spilt some gravy on his coat. The storm passed presently, and signalized its disappearance with a laugh; but the following day before quitting the train at Vienna, the Englishman said to the doctor—

"I am puzzled about our friend's nationality; but did you notice when he swore at the waiter how his fingers closed

on his knife—his fingers with all those rings on them? I should be sorry to be a woman, alone with him, when he lost his temper.”

“Sir,” said the doctor when the moment came for parting, “I shall never forget your goodness to me a stranger.”

CHAPTER II.

VIENNA that spring, owing to certain public events, was unusually full of foreigners; and amongst them were numbers of the English who had been spending the winter on the Continent. Indeed, the British Ambassadors was fully justified in saying, as she said one evening to a cluster of old friends, that though that year she would be unable to go to London, for the last fortnight London had come to her.

This remark was made in her own drawing-room, where the guests were assembling for a purely English dinner-party, and where London diamonds and London silks and satins were glittering and glimmering under constellations of candles.

“My dear,” she went on regretfully, as she drew aside from the others a distinguished-looking woman, the whiteness of whose well-crimped hair, due though it was to age, had the youthful effect of powder, “I thought, of course, that you would have gone in with Julian; but the Princess’s coming has disturbed all my arrangements, and I’m afraid I shall have to consign you to old Lord R—— instead. I am more sorry than I can say; but you’ll see that I’ve done my best for you. You will sit by his deaf ear, so you need not utter a word to him; and on the other side of you, you will have Robert Grenville.”

“Mr. Grenville!” said the lady whose fate was thus announced to her, “I met him first when he was an attaché in Paris, when half the French ladies were in love with him, and he had just published some love-poems. Somehow or other one has not heard much of him lately. He ought, with his talents, to have made more noise in the world.” Then, with her eyebrows slightly raised, and her lips for a moment

smiling with a humorous self-contempt, "If that man," she said, "had been born a generation earlier, I fully believe I should have fallen in love with him myself."

"I've no doubt you would, my dear," said the Ambassadors with a certain trenchancy, not malicious itself, but hinting a sense on her part of saying something that might be said maliciously. "You will, therefore, be happy to hear that he is now in a fair way to make as much noise in the world as even his best friends could desire. Let us ask Julian." And she turned round to her husband. "Just look at him. He is quite absorbed in your niece. It is always with him a case of the 'eternal feminine.' Julian," she said, "Lady Ashford is asking about Mr. Grenville. She would like to hear how a poet is going to rise to fame."

The Ambassador was indeed engrossed in what seemed his most frequent occupation—that of talking to the youngest and prettiest woman in the room. When thus appealed to he made no answer for a moment, but murmured to his companion, in his low indolent voice, "Did you ever know a poet? If you didn't, you must keep your eyes open, and you will see one to-night eating his dinner opposite to you." Then, lifting himself from his seat and coming towards his wife, he put his hand on her arm with a charming air of devotion, and said to Lady Ashford: "So you are talking of Robert Grenville. Many people, most likely, will soon be doing the same. I had a letter yesterday from the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and he told me that never, in all his former experience, had he met any one with such a natural genius for finance."

"Finance!" echoed Lady Ashford. "What on earth are you talking about? What has finance to do with Mr. Grenville the poet?"

"Our poet," said the Ambassador, "is unfortunately a poet no longer; and the crown that is now held out to him was never woven by the Muses. What has happened to him has been this: I thought that of course you had heard of it. Just before the opening of last autumn's session, the Chancellor of the Exchequer lost one of his secretaries, and found himself suddenly overwhelmed in a country house with more work than he could manage without assistance. Grenville, who was staying there also, offered to do what he could for him. He did so, and with results that astonished the Chancellor and himself equally. He continued to act as secretary for the

whole of the next six months: and now, when Sir Jacob Jackson goes home in July, Robert Grenville will take his post at Constantinople. If he can deal with the difficulties which are accumulating and awaiting him there, he may easily find himself at once one of the foremost figures in Europe."

"Well," said Lady Ashford, plaintively, "it's an odd metamorphosis. One could never have thought that—what shall I call him?—well, a drawing-room love-poet, was the sort of stuff out of which fate could make a financier."

"There are," said the ambassador, "two sorts of love-poets: the one with whom poetry is a substitute for life; the other with whom it is a mere expression of part of it. The one is a dreamer whose ambition is passionate writing; the other is a man of action, whose ambition is passionate living. Grenville was of this last sort, and you can see it in all his verses. In every line you can feel what the man who wrote them was thinking about. He was thinking not about verse; he was thinking about a woman. To women, at any rate, this was their great charm. They showed that the writer would probably have been an interesting lover. Now, dear Lady Ashford," he went on, "of course you are aware of this—that of all important businesses, love-making in the world is the one which requires most knowledge of the world; so I don't think we need wonder if a man who excelled in that should be able to turn his talent to other practical uses."

"Julian," said the Ambassador, "when you have done your discourse on poetry, I want to inform you that here is Princess Plekonitz."

"My dear friend," exclaimed the Ambassador, turning round, and looking as if he would take in his arms the figure that stood before him, "what ages since we met! The sight of you makes me young again."

The Princess was a short sharp-eyed woman of seventy, with a face which was bright with a kind of caustic benevolence, and on which age had re-written the smiles of her prime in wrinkles. She was English, an heiress—the widow of a Hungarian magnate; and as soon as her host was tired of retaining both her hands, she began to look round the room as if searching for old acquaintances. She failed, however, to discover any, even with the aid of her gleaming eye-glasses, till the last guest having arrived, the movement was made for dinner. Then suddenly, as she was taking her host's arm, "Who's that?" she

asked. "Isn't it Mr. Grenville—Robert Grenville—Bobby, I used to call him? Yes, it's you," she called out, in a high-pitched and foreign-sounding voice, as a man at a little distance, who was just claiming his companion, turned round and recognized her. "It's me too. Go on; and come and talk to me afterwards."

Robert Grenville experienced an immediate consequence of having attention thus pointedly drawn to him. He had reached Vienna only a few hours ago; he had entered the room only at the last moment, and except by his host and hostess his arrival had not been noticed. But rapid glances were now cast in his direction; and he felt rather than saw that he was an object of appreciable interest. However small may be a man's share of vanity, there is in this feeling something which is not displeasing to him. Robert Grenville, though he was less vain than most men, was suddenly conscious that his spirits rose a little; and he sat down to dinner with a sense that he had more to say than he had, when a moment ago he was starting to leave the drawing-room.

This was lucky for the young lady of whom he had been given the charge. She was the daughter of a Colonial Governor, now on his way to England; and though she was a little subdued by the grandeur of an Ambassadorial dinner-party, yet under the surface were visible all the airs and graces which had claimed and rebuked devotion in the halls of Government House. Grenville had had a foreboding that conversation would not be possible with her, but he now felt nerved for all the demands of duty; and by the time she had freed her gloves from the embraces of a whole family of bangles, he had hit on a question which made his path clear for him. On the opposite side of the table was a man with a bulbous face, whom he remembered once to have seen perspiring with importance at the Foreign Office. He asked his neighbour—providentially in guarded language—if she knew who this gentleman was, hardly expecting that she could tell him; and she, with an arch smile and a little jerk of her head, said, "Don't you know? That's my *pater*—that's Sir Septimus Wilkinson." Then cheered by a sense of superior social knowledge, she continued, "Look there—that is Sir Theophilus Entwistle." And she pointed out, by a nod, another star of the Colonial Office, partially eclipsed for the time being by a napkin, the corner of which he was tucking

inside his collar. Her eyes now made a careful tour of the table, and with increasing buoyancy she presently proclaimed to Grenville that she could, as she expressed it, "tell him about nearly everybody." The young lady's information was comprehensive rather than accurate. The names she mentioned were correct, and the persons named were present; but she was not successful in putting the two together; and Grenville was for the moment struck dumb with astonishment when somebody else was pointed out to him as himself. He was, however, far too good-natured a man to confuse his informant by any blunt and cruel correction; but, adroitly pretending not to have understood her meaning, he managed to set her right without showing that he had discovered her to be wrong. All this made a good deal of conversation; but at last the subject was exhausted, and Grenville's wit was failing him, when a spotty little attaché, Miss Wilkinson's other neighbour, caught her bead-like eye and soon relieved him of her attention.

"Mr. Grenville, I am at last able to speak to you." The words were Lady Ashford's, and they sounded like a musical bell. Grenville turned round; his entire bearing changed, and his face took the look of interest which he had been just trying to simulate. "That young person," Lady Ashford continued, "seems to me to have made you very vivacious. She was your lawful partner certainly; but I'm sure you have done your duty by her, so you must now devote yourself to me and help to deliver me from mine."

"Ah," replied Grenville, "this is really delightful. I always thought talking to you a pleasure that could never be improved upon; but to-night it will have the added charm of an infidelity."

Lady Ashford's age was not far from seventy, but much of the beauty for which she once was famous remained with her, and there still floated in her eyes a St. Martin's summer of youth.

"Is this," she said, looking at Grenville, "the result of a poet's philosophy? But you're no longer a poet—I ought to have remembered that; and now I remember that I want you to tell me what you are. Come, I must have your whole story out of you—the metamorphosis of the poet into the man of action. When did the change begin? How did you grow practical."

Grenville looked at her with the shy air of a man who honestly hates being the hero of his own conversation ; but Lady Ashford was at once so firm and so fascinating that she had soon extracted from him the information she asked for.

" Well," she said, when he had finished, " and so it all came to this. The world, when first you entered it, was enchanted for you by two necromancers, love and religion, who coloured it with colours, and filled it with objects of ambition, which gradually, as years went on, dissolved or faded from your sight, till at last you woke up to what you now consider realities. Like most gentlemen nowadays, you happened not to be rich ; and the first reality that came home to you was the want of some more money. Accordingly you began to dabble in what you describe as business, and you found your wits were far sharper than you expected. You did not, however, make your fortune in the first six weeks, and you were beginning to think that real life was a failure, when you suddenly stumbled into a high-road to success—a sort of success better than what you were looking for in the city ; for it gives you a promise not of fortune only, but of fame. Now to a man ambitious like you—for you always were ambitious—this luck ought to be intoxicating. Still, it is success not as you used to dream of it ; you dreamed of it with the feelings of a poet. You are achieving it as a practical man. I want you to tell me if it disappoints or satisfies you."

" When it comes," said Grenville, " I will tell you with great pleasure ; but I am not aware that I have yet succeeded in anything."

Lady Ashford laughed softly. " Mr. Grenville," she answered, " do you know what I say to that ?—Stuff ! You have the opportunity of succeeding, and other people know you have. You are exciting expectations, though you have not yet satisfied them ; and that, to a man in your position, is success in its most flattering stage. I heard our host saying, as he went in to dinner in front of me, that he never had known so rapid a rise as yours. You were always a figure of some interest in society ; all of a sudden you are beginning to make a stir in it. I had realized this to-night before you entered the drawing-room. You cannot pretend you were unconscious of the same thing yourself. Well," she said, sighing, " listen to this. I was told long ago by somebody who ought to have known, how nothing is so sweet to a man

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as this first breath of applause—that it makes him feel as if his life were beginning to rise on wings. The dawn of fame must be like the dawn of love. Once upon a time I used often to say that to myself. I want you to be frank with me, and tell me your own experience.”

“Well,” said Grenville, with an almost boyish embarrassment, which presently resolved itself into almost boyish frankness, “if you will have me expose myself, I *will* make the admission that I have some sense of success in me, something like what you mention; and I suppose it pleases me. Yes—yes: of course it does. I am going to be quite honest with you. I have so long thought and felt to so little purpose, that there is something exhilarating in the knowledge that I am now about to act; and in the hope that I shall not, as I began to think I should, pass through the world leaving no mark behind me, having done nothing, and having been nothing. But that’s not all. I am also conscious of a certain fuss being made about me. I am ashamed to mention the little trifles I am thinking of; and yet I confess that they have the same effect on me which a glass of champagne has on a man who has long been tired. But as to feeling as if I were going to rise on wings—no, Lady Ashford, I can’t follow you there. My wings by this time have hardly a feather left on them, though once they were plumed with illusions bright as a bird of Paradise. And as to the dawn of fame being like the dawn of love—”

“Well?” said Lady Ashford.

“As to that,” he replied, “I can say nothing. What is love like? I cannot even remember. For good or evil, it is an impulse which has slipped out of my life; and I cannot call it back again. Indeed I am not certain if I should wish to do so.”

Lady Ashford looked at him for a few seconds in silence, and then said, “Never mind. It will come back to you one day. Let us put all our talk about ambition and success aside. The real story of your life, Mr. Grenville, is still to come.”

“Why do you think so?” asked Grenville, with a certain natural curiosity.

“Because,” she said, “in spite of your good spirits, in spite of your sense of success, I see a want in your eyes, I hear a want in your voice, which a woman recognizes, and of which she knows the meaning. The reason why love thus far has made so little impression on your memory, is not that you

found so little in it, but that you looked for so much more ; and this *much more* your nature is still waiting for. Listen, and let me teach you a small fragment of philosophy. Some of the women—I hope you will not be shocked at me—some of the women who have loved best have been women who found that they could not love their husbands. And why ? They have learnt how much they longed to give and receive, by realizing how much one man could neither understand or give. People talk about first love : but the thing they talk about is a fiction just as the Golden Age is. First love in reality is like a first attempt on the fiddle. The magic and the music only come with experience. To love successfully you must often have loved in vain. You think this is a paradox, but it isn't. To make love complete—you may take a woman's word for it—it must be not only a giver of joy, but a healer of sorrow also ; a resurrection of hope rather than its birth. A boy's love may be life : a man's love is another life. This, Mr Grenville, is the love which you are waiting for ; or, if you like it better, which is somewhere waiting for you. And you may trust me in this, that when such love comes to a man, the passions of youth can show nothing to equal it. Don't despise my prophecy, because it comes from an old woman. You will find your fate : and old as I am I still remember mine."

"Yes," said Grenville, half involuntarily ; "but you are a woman, and a woman who has once loved and remembers it can never be old."

"And a man," said Lady Ashford, "is always young, so long as a woman who is young loves him."

"Unfortunately," said Grenville, laughing, "no young woman loves *me*." But then he suddenly checked himself and went on in a different tone : "Lady Ashford, you prophesy like an angel ; but unfortunately I hear you like Sarah behind the tent-door. Do you remember just now how you summed up the biography of my youth ? You said that love and religion were two necromancers who had enchanted life for me. You were wrong. The real necromancer was the Imagination, which we used to think was the child of the other two, but which science and experience at last show us to be their parent. The children die of shame when we discover their parentage ; and the Imagination itself cannot survive its children."

CHAPTER III.

THE conversation was here arrested by a sharp and startling sound. The chimney of a large lamp, which was in front of Grenville, had broken ; some disturbance was caused by the servant's removing it from the table ; and when Grenville again was in a position to speak or listen, Lady Ashford's ear had been captured by her other neighbour.

"And so that is Mr. Grenville, to whom you have just been talking?" Lord R—— was saying slowly, in the loud penetrating tone which deaf people, who require it to be applied to themselves, are not unfrequently accustomed to apply to others. Like many deaf and elderly people also, Lord R—— seemed always to be living in a little world of his own ; and he had a charming habit of discussing those close to him, as if he were as much out of their hearing as they were out of his. "A very clever promising young man," he went on. "I knew his father intimately—a very, very, very clever young man."

Grenville judiciously tried to escape from his own praises, and fixed his attention on the opposite side of the table. He found no difficulty in keeping it there. For the first time he saw an object facing him, which up to now the lamp had entirely hidden. It was the young girl—Lady Ashford's beautiful niece—to whom, before dinner, the Ambassador had been so gallantly devoting himself. It was impossible not to be struck by her—by her dazzling skin, by her dark melancholy eyes, and still more by an indefinable something—a something in her expression, her dress, her bearing—which gave her, despite her girlhood, the air of a married woman. Sitting next to her was Sir Septimus Wilkinson, talking to her with a voluble but elephantine eagerness, and giving point to his eloquence by gesticulating with his thick fingers. She, at the moment when Grenville first caught sight of her, was looking down with a sort of contemptuous self-possession, and amusing herself with examining her own beautiful hands. A moment later, and for a moment only, he saw her glance up at the shapeless face close to her, as if doubting and wondering whether a thing like that could be really made of the same flesh and blood as herself. Rapid as the glance was,

Grenville felt that he understood it. The second after the girl's eyes met his own. As they did so, they seemed to expand softly, a certain light flashed up out of their depths, and there was the slightest undulation imaginable in the lines of her scarlet lips. Then all was over; she coolly turned away from him, and with a condescending animation began to address Sir Septimus.

No sooner had this happened than he was once more conscious of his own name being mentioned in tones as audible as before. "And now," Lord R—— was saying, "he's soon going to be married—that is to say, you understand, if he succeeds in his new career." Lady Ashford tapped him on his threadbare sleeve with her fan, doing her best to stop him. He took it for encouragement, and his voice became even louder. "The young lady's Lord Solway's niece—Lady Evelyn Standish—a very nice girl, a dear charming girl; and if she marries with her uncle's consent she will have a considerable fortune. He will consent if Mr. Grenville succeeds—I know this for a fact: he told me so himself, but the matter is not yet to be spoken about."

Lady Ashford did the only thing to be done. She stopped any further disclosures by turning abruptly from the speaker; and she fixed her eyes with an odd look upon Grenville. There was surprise in them, and amusement in them, and also a wondering and half-reproachful inquiry.

"Mr. Grenville," she said, "this revelation is a judgment on you. Here is the man who never can love again. When we were talking just now, you were arguing under false colours."

"No," said Grenville, gravely, "I think not. That poem, or, if you like it, that prayer, of the spirit and of the pulses—that wild and soaring impulse which, if my memory serves me, takes us off our feet, and of which we were speaking when we spoke of love—surely this is not essential to a happy marriage; perhaps it is hardly compatible with one."

"I'll tell you, Mr. Grenville," said Lady Ashford, "what I should advise your doing. If you don't keep a diary, begin one this very night. Put down in it just what you now are feeling, which no doubt actually is what you have been trying to tell me. Do that; and the time will come when you will laugh as you look back to it. Or perhaps you won't laugh—perhaps you will do something else."

"Do you think," said Grenville, "that I shall only learn to

love, by finding out that I cannot love my wife—whom, I may as well tell you, I have not yet asked to marry me? But come—let us drop *me*. As a subject, I must be quite exhausted. Suppose we talk about that lovely young lady opposite. I never saw such a pair of eyes in my life. Who is she?"

"She is my niece—Juanita Markham. Her mother was a Viennese. She has come here to see her relations. Yes—she has beautiful eyes—poor girl! She, too, Mr. Grenville, has all her life before her."

"And what," said Grenville, "is the fate you predict for her? Do you think that she, before she learns to love, must find out that she cannot love her husband?"

"I hope not," said Lady Ashford with sudden sadness. "There are many things which we excuse in ourselves, and which we should yet dread for our children. See—we are moving. We all go out together. There is Princess Plekonitz looking at you over her shoulder."

Grenville during dinner had not known that he was being flattered; but when he reached the drawing-room his condition was like that of a man who feels the effects of wine on going into the fresh air. The dress, the lights, the mirrors, the white and gold of the walls, had now a brilliance for him which he had not noticed before. It seemed all to belong to his life, as an appropriate setting does to a stone. In another moment this impression became yet keener. He was rapidly surrounded by the more distinguished of the guests—by men with stars, and women glittering with tiaras. He knew them all more or less, and had been accustomed to certain civilities from them. But he felt that now they were offering him some wholly unfamiliar tribute. He was the centre of a circle, not part of its circumference; and he learnt a truth which can be taught only by experience—how different these two positions, so near together, may be.

From one such moment he passed on to another. The Princess Plekonitz had a circle round her also, of people talking or wanting to talk to her; but the instant his eyes met hers he saw it was himself she was thinking about. She beckoned him to her sofa with a movement of her fan and of her eyebrows; and the others, as he came up to her, separated. A couple of young men, however, did not go far, and he soon understood the reason; for sitting beside her on the sofa was the beautiful Miss Juanita Markham.

The Princess with effusion held out a wrinkled hand to him. She expressed a vivacious pleasure at thus unexpectedly seeing him; she recalled the old times when he had stayed at her house in England; and complimented him on his prospects in a way that would have sounded fulsome if the strong foreign accent, which she had acquired in living abroad, had not sufficed to confer a peculiar privilege on her English. All the time, however, though he listened and responded cordially, he could not prevent a certain part of his consciousness being occupied with Miss Markham, and the fate of her two admirers. These last he had taken in at a glance. They were indeed attached to the Embassy, and he more or less knew both of them. They were well-bred young men, with the quietest manners imaginable; and if ordinary expensive dissipation means knowledge of life, they were probably right in flattering themselves that they were complete men of the world: but the girl's manner to them—a manner even quieter than their own—reduced each of them—Grenville could plainly see this—one after the other, in his own estimation, to a boy. Their first observations had been made with a smiling confidence. She had smiled also, and replied with complete civility; but joined to that civility was a yet more complete indifference, which seemed to produce, as it were, some chemical change in their characters. They blushed; they repeated their words; their laughs became doubtful and apologetic; and they presently found that nothing was left for them but to retreat, with an air that betrayed discomfiture, whilst it aimed heroically at indifference.

"Listen," the Princess was by this time saying to Grenville: "the thing is quite simple; I will tell you all the particulars."

Whatever the particulars were they threatened to be long in telling; and Grenville, who had been standing hitherto, unconsciously scanned the sofa, as if to see whether there was room for him to be seated. Miss Markham, with extraordinary quickness, caught the meaning of his look and, raising her eyes to his with a full unflinching softness, moved so as to make a place for him between the Princess and herself.

"Thank you," he said, as he sat down; "I hope I am not crushing your dress."

"You are not," she replied, with a smile on her lips, which were half parted. "But I think you have done one thing. Do you see what it is? You have hurt a feather of my fan." And, as if to explain the injury thus complained of, with a

movement that might have seemed accidental, she drew the feather across his hand.

"Allow me to look at it," he said, with a slight accent of ceremony. "I trust I have done no harm." And he offered, as he spoke, to take the fan from her to examine it. But she, giving the feather a little semi-petulant pull, said, "No, after all I think it has not been broken. And showing him for a moment the faint remains of a smile, she folded her fan before her and gave her attention to the carpet.

This little episode over, and it did but occupy a minute, Grenville turned to the Princess, and seemed at once to forget it, in the interest of the subject which he was soon busy discussing with her. It was a subject, as any one might have seen, who caught any fragment of the conversation, involving the settlement of many practical details; and any one might have seen also that a conclusion was at last arrived at about it which was highly satisfactory to both the parties interested, and had given to Grenville, indeed, a look of greater excitement than his face had shown before during any part of the evening.

At this juncture the Ambassador approached the sofa, and speaking with a grace that made a refusal impossible, asked Miss Markham if she would sing. Lady Ashford indeed interposed, saying, "She has brought no music." But Miss Markham, simple in her absolute self-possession, admitted that she could sing by heart; and rising, with a well-bred smile, was forthwith seated at the piano. She was soon surrounded; and Grenville, to his own surprise, found himself standing nearest to her. Her eyes had invited him to attend her, and he had obeyed the summons, not because he wished to do so, but because he could not, without rudeness, do otherwise. She raised her eyes to his—eyes dark and velvety, like a heartsease—as he saw now; and drawing off her long gloves, gave them to him without a word. She sang. Her voice was low, but startling from the emotion that seemed to vibrate in it. Her audience listened breathless, but from surprise quite as much as from admiration; and Grenville heard the voice of the Princess mutter, "No young girl should be able to sing like that." Sir Septimus Wilkinson, however, was far from sharing such an opinion. His eyes shone, and his forehead was moist with admiration. He clapped his hands, and vociferously asked for more; and most of the men, though more polished,

were equally sincere in their applause. Miss Markham, however, could refuse a request as simply and gravely as she could comply with one; and saying that she had just heard her aunt's carriage announced, moved towards Lady Ashford, who evidently wished to go. And now the entertainment yielded its last incident to Grenville. As Lady Ashford was in the act of saying "good-bye" to him, Miss Markham turned towards him also, as if to include herself in a common process of leave-taking; and then, with a look in her eyes of intentional hesitation, she held out her hand to him, and took his in a lingering clasp.

As soon as she was gone, he turned to the Princess. "You told me," he said, "that I had new prospects before me. The prospect which you held out to me, and which I never dreamt of till to-night, is the newest and most fascinating of all."

CHAPTER IV.

GRENVILLE, that night in his bed, found himself pleasantly restless, as he had hardly found himself since his first London season, when he had walked home from balls through the dewy stillness of Piccadilly, with music and palm-trees in his memory, some girl's voice in his heart, and the cool dim primrose of the summer morning in his eyes. He made many efforts to sleep, but just as each seemed succeeding, some fresh thought would touch him, which allured him back into wakefulness; so that at last he got up, and, partially redressing himself, he prepared to act on the only one of these thoughts which was at the present moment capable of being acted on.

"I will do," he said to himself, "what Lady Ashford suggested; I will begin a diary. I will describe my present situation and prospects, social as well as mental. Some day or other the reading it may keep me awake. At any rate, writing it will now help me to sleep."

He found a note-book in his dressing-bag sufficiently suitable for his purpose; the earlier pages indeed being full of old memoranda, but the greater part being blank; and without a moment's hesitation, began his first sentence thus—

"The day after to-morrow, I am going to do something so strange to me, so unexpected, and so interesting, something suggested to me for the first time this evening—" He paused, scratched this out, and presently made a new beginning.

"Lady Ashford," he wrote, "told me, as to one point, the truth about myself. I am, as she said, ambitious, and always was so. But I am better than merely ambitious, for I will be just to myself. I always longed to receive the external insignia of success—fame, influence, place, personal deference; but I have longed to deserve these quite as much as to receive them. Had I deserved them without receiving them, I should perhaps have despised life. Had I received them without deserving them, I should certainly have despised myself. And yet why? Why to me should self-respect be a thing so sacred? What meaning can I attach to it? Could I only give this question a logical answer, I should have what, as I told my friend the doctor in the train, I have not, and what he has no more than I; I should have a creed which I could express and live by—a religion made visible by reason, or, in orthodox language, by the *Logos*.

"But I am not writing theology. Let me get back to myself. To put a plain thing in a plain way, I have always, so long as I can remember anything, had in my blood—I don't know how else to describe it—a sense that I was a person who, for some reason, ought to be a personage. This seemed to me to be simply in the fitness of things. It is a fitness, however, that I have been always missing. A certain reputation I have achieved, no doubt. My early volume of poems—my only volume—gave me some fashionable celebrity. I devoted myself to science and philosophy; and great thinkers and discoverers considered me worth talking to. But my reputation has never been more than this—the imputing to me the capacity of success I have never realized. Let me be quite frank. I have missed my opportunities; I have not made myself distinguished: and not to be distinguished, for a man like me, is a humiliation. It is to have fallen from an estate to which my hopes instinctively had raised me, and my right to which, from a boy, I had never doubted. But gradually I was ceasing to be conscious that this humiliation was mine.

"In one's prime, such a condition may be bearable, and its real character disguised, when social life still possesses its piquancy. But in maturer age—above all in old age—how

wretched and unknown would be the creeping fate in store for me! Even now I have felt its paralyzing cold approach. For even now, what am I?—or at all events, what was I yesterday? My early fame as a poet is already nearly evaporated, like stale scent on a pocket-handkerchief. I represent a family whose importance has long passed, and at last is as good as ruined. What reaches my own pockets from my mortgaged property is a thousand a year, barely; and a third of this I give to a poor, helpless relation—an aunt who was kind to me in my childhood, and who has lost most of her own small fortune by investing it without advice. My house—what good does its stately beauty do me? or the fact that Americans drive miles to stare at it? It is let to a brewer, and I live in a London lodging. How often have I shuddered at certain old men of fashion, with no home except a London lodging, and their clubs, and with no life except dining, shooting, and visiting with a dwindling generation of friends! And I have seen in their old age a flattered foreshadowing of my own.

“There! that part of my diary is done; and I have not winced in writing it; for true as it was till lately, it is true no longer. Now all is changed. Sometimes I hardly know myself. I feel as if a fog had lifted; or as if, after walking for years on sand, I had suddenly gained firm ground. But never till to-night did I realize this fully. I am in a fair way now to making myself genuinely distinguished; I shall also, for a time at all events, receive a considerable income—what a strange thing to me!—and whatever advantages I thus gain, I may hope to consolidate by a marriage, which will not only bring me further fortune, but a home and affection also.

“All these blessings, so long as they were never in my reach, I had learnt to despise as a philosopher. I now look forward to them with the healthy eagerness of a child; and a hundred interests in life, which were lately like dead flowers, hold up their stalks and heads again.

“Let me put down the story of this marriage prospect of mine, and see exactly what it comes to.

“I knew Lady Evelyn Standish quite well when she was a child. A year ago I met her again, as a grown-up young lady. I met her often, but I did not give much thought to her, till I gradually became conscious that whenever I spoke in her presence, she listened to me, and that she constantly followed

me with her frank, guileless eyes. Hers is the kind of charm that one only sees if one looks for it; but the moment I saw it, it was a charm that drew me towards her, because—and in this I do not think I deceive myself—for some reason or other she was herself drawn towards me. The idea of a marriage with her soon shaped itself in my mind; but it was an idea which at that time I put aside as impossible. I knew that if she married with the approbation of an uncle, who is her guardian, she would in all probability have a considerable fortune; but neither to her nor to him would I present myself as a penniless fortune-hunter. Then my chance came; then my prospects changed; and without delay, though not without diffidence, I approached her guardian, and explained myself completely to him. He received me with a kindness that was beyond all my expectations; and if I do not, within the next six months, disappoint both myself and him, he will fully sanction me in doing my best to win her. And he will do more. He will do what is a complete surprise to me. He will—that is, supposing the marriage happens—settle the property on her which marches with my own; and he will make arrangements by which, within a measurable time, my own may be freed from the greater part of its encumbrances. Can this be true? Will my own home ever be my home again? Shall I go with my wife up the avenue to my own door, by whose twisted pillars and under whose old brick arches my mother's eyes so often welcomed and said good-bye to me? And the rooms and galleries, which had grown so faint in my memory, and in which I find that I remember every picture, every cabinet, and every book-case—shall I, with a happy wife, one day redeem them? We shall—we actually shall, if one may put any faith in probabilities. It all seems to me, in one way, like a dream; and yet I seem to myself, at the same time, less as if I were dreaming, than as if I were awakening to reality—to the place in the world that I was made for.

“Well—now I come to the point, for the sake of discussing which I was recommended to begin this diary; and which, no doubt, is important, though not for the reason that makes Lady Ashford think so. I am brought to it naturally, by telling myself my own story. I have spoken about a wife. What more natural than to ask what my feelings are about love? Upon my word, my feelings about it at this moment

are so slight and lukewarm, that I am irritated by the mere idea of discussing them.

"This sounds a strange confession to make, after just confessing myself intent on a happy marriage. But to any one who looks that fact in the face, it is not strange in the least. Any such judicious person will acquit me of a paradox, when I say that the fact of my being able to love, is the precise fact which makes me so fit to marry. For by love what do we mean? We mean two things—now one, now the other. We mean, first, a mere caprice of the sentiment or the senses, which comes and goes like a squall, and does often as much mischief. I have suffered from love of that kind, as most men have. I can't say I have repented of having yielded to it; for such repentances are apt to be dirtier than such sins; but I have done better—I have got free from its influence. That girl this evening—her exquisite beauty I could see as well as most men, at once sensual and melancholy, like that of a lost angel; but till this moment, when she occurs to me as an illustration, since I said good-night to her, she has never once entered my memory. It needs no witch to tell us that love of this kind had best be over and done with before one thinks of marriage. But I am not talking of that. I am talking of love in another sense—in the sense of poets, and romances, and all men and women who can understand them. I am talking of that despotic emotion which claims to extinguish, and which does extinguish, while it lasts, all other emotions, as the sun extinguishes a candle; which lifts us up, carries us away, alters by magic the relative value we put on things; and claims not to complete and crown the ordinary blessings of life, but to supersede them. This is what I mean by love, when I say that I am no longer capable of it; and I say well that I am fit to marry, in virtue of being thus incapable. For let me look at the matter fairly. The life of a man like myself ought to be largely in his work; unless it is so, it will be incomplete. But if you love a woman in the way I speak of, every interest is a rival to her; every interest is a wrong. Such love creates sins, just as the Scotch Sunday does. It turns a career into a kind of mental adultery. For a man like myself then, the love that would absorb all life is not to fit to occupy any part of it. To love intensely is to be always saying one's prayers: and a man like myself must labour as well as pray. I am thus fortunate in being able to say this of myself—that

I can hardly now conceive of love as a thing that should practically alter the general arrangements of my life, though I can not only conceive but long for an affection that shall complete them.

"Yes, now I come to the real heart of the matter—the key to my seeming paradox. I have done with love—true; but there is another feeling—we may call it not love but affection—which condescends to accommodate itself to circumstances, and to take its luck along with them. It does not complain, as love does, like an unreasonable woman in a railway-carriage, if, when the train is full, it cannot have a compartment to itself: nor does it ask that others should be crushed together, in order to leave it the luxury of two seats; but taking quietly such place as may be vacant for it, it insensibly humanizes and blesses its fellow-travellers, instead of trying to push them out of the windows. Such an affection I can not only understand, but I long to give and to receive it. That I have it to give, I know. That I shall receive it, I hope. It will not transfigure life with 'the light that never was on sea or land'; but it will be the light and warmth of a hearth which makes the chamber of life habitable, and which robs even the shadows of their mystery, their coldness, and their gloom."

In writing these last words Grenville had turned over a page, and was about to proceed, when something suddenly checked him. "What on earth," he exclaimed, "is here?" The cause of his exclamation was some lines scribbled in pencil. They were faint and not very legible, and he moved the book towards the candle. It was only when he had done this, that he saw them to be in his own handwriting, and also recognized them as verses. With puzzled curiosity, he began making them out; and at length, after much searching, he recovered the faded memory of what long ago had occasioned them. "Well," he said to himself, "as they are here I will ink them in. They shall stand here as a witness, either for or against, a kind of susceptibility which I am myself delighted to have outgrown."

The verses in question were as follows—

"Faith may live, though long doubts chill it;
Charity will suffer much;
But for Hope—a touch can kill it,
And it rises at a touch.

- "Where the cinerarias glisten
In your garden by the sea,
At my side you once would listen,
Till your cheek was close to me.
- "Where your caverns breathe and murmur
With the salt sea's sound and scent,
Day by day your hand was firmer
On my arm : until I went
- "Whispering in imagination
To your image on the air,
All that love can teach to passion,
All that both can learn from prayer.
- "Go—go—go : for now I know
All those days of vain desire,
In your memory melt like snow ;
But on mine they lie like fire."

Grenville read the verses over several times, smiling incredulously. He then took up his pen again. "What wretched words for songs," he wrote, "can be buoyed up into poetry, like a ship lifted by a tide, if they are set to passionate music, and sung with feeling. And that which music does for a song written by somebody else, may, in the case of the writer himself, be done for it by his own emotions. These verses of mine, for instance—I have no doubt when I wrote them there was some emotion at work in me, which made them for me full of sound and meaning. But now the emotion is gone, and they seem to me like something withered. They have lost a body, or they have lost a soul. They are like the ghost of a poem, or the fossil of a poem. They are in fact a type of my former self, and an illustration of the only way in which it survives in me—that self I have outgrown so utterly.

"And yet, no ; I am wrong there. Writing out one's thoughts in this way is like untangling a ball of string ; things follow one another in such unexpected connection. It is perfectly true that, so far as any personal devotion goes, my days of romance are over ; but the effects on me of my past experience are far more than a mere ghostly memory. I see life with different eyes in consequence of it. All the women I have ever known and sought, seem in my memory to have become one, who has all varieties of sympathy and allurements

united in her ; and this woman, or rather this womanhood, though silently withdrawing itself below the horizon of youth, is not lost, but colours the air of maturity with all the colours of a sunset.

“Let me ramble on about this subject a little longer. Most men love, I suppose, at one time of their lives ; but the love-memories of most of them are like decayed, or at least like dried, rose-leaves. The love-memories of others are like attar of roses. For these men, love in this changed form penetrates all their lives, breathing amongst their thoughts like the breath of spring in a wood, or perhaps like the breath of autumn, and gives a soul to everything. That is the secret of my own feeling for nature—for such a sunset, for instance, as the doctor and I looked at : and here am I, without intending to do so, accounting for that feeling very much as the doctor did. For me, each beautiful prospect—a purple Italian twilight, an old silvery town shining in mist on a mountain-side—is, what without my experience it never could be ; it is a keepsake of some forgotten passion, and inspires life, as passion did, with what is really the essence of youth—a sense of possibilities still waiting for fulfilment.

“The string of my thoughts still goes on untangling itself. I see that, without thinking about it, I have mentioned two things together—an Italian twilight and an old town. There was more in that than mere accident, for the two things represented by them are curiously and closely connected—Nature and the historic past. Just as Nature suggests the lost romance of one’s own life, so does the past represent romance in general. Each charms us by producing an illusion which will never be destroyed, because each presents us with a dream which will never again be a reality. We see the present reflected in the past, shining like a Golden Age, as we see the sky in water.

“This is no mere imaginary pleasure, for me at all events, though it is due to the imagination. I myself feel it to be real, delightful, invigorating ; and my good spirits at this moment are mainly due to the fact that I am going to have a fresh taste of it. Thus all this discourse of mine about my own feelings brings me naturally to what a diary ought to be—a record of events. Here comes my story. I have been working so hard for the past eight or nine months, that I found myself at last growing quite unable to sleep—not

however for the reasons that are keeping me awake now. What keeps me awake now is my imagination holding a holiday; what has been keeping me awake lately has been the refusal of my brain to take one. Schedules, statistics, calculations, drafts of financial schemes—these are the things that have been haunting me at night like furies, driving sleep from my heavy eyelids as vigilantly as they could, and turning such short dreams as they could not keep away, into weary visions of pages of official paper, or grotesque echoes of official conversations. My health thus came to be such, that I have been ordered a six-weeks' rest, the first days of which were to be merely a change of work—consisting of some easy official business at Vienna. The remainder of the time is to be altogether my own. The Princess to-night asked me how I meant to spend it. I told her that originally I had been divided between two plans. One was an expedition along the Dalmatian coast, the other was a desultory wandering amongst some districts of Northern Italy. 'I am,' I said, 'devoted to old things—to old towns, old castles, old palaces, to the spectacle of old peasant life where it still remains unchanged, and old national costumes flashing in embrowned market-places; and in Dalmatia or Italy I meant to have seen my fill of them. But as I went on I happened to learn from some friends of certain wonderful castles in Bohemia, and among the Carpathian Mountains.'

"The Princess suddenly interrupted me, screwing up her eyes with a smile of benign contempt.

"'Bohemia,' she said, 'and the Carpathian Mountains! Nonsense! If you want to see castles, come and stay with me in mine, in Hungary; and I will help you to see as many others as you wish. Don't laugh like that. When I give an invitation, I mean it. If you cared for new things, I should have been afraid to ask you; but if you really like what is musty, why there's no more to be said; and you will have in my old owl's nest a musty old woman into the bargain.'

"'If you wish me to stay with you,' I said, 'till you even suggest what you call yourself, you would have to keep me for the term of my natural life.'

"'Pah!' she answered, 'I don't want compliments. I want to know if you are going to do what I ask you. I go home to-morrow myself; and if you will arrive next day, a well-aired bed will be ready for you, and the fire in the parlour

lighted. So come—decide upon coming, and stay as long as you can amuse yourself.’

“The invitation was so unexpected, and I was so delighted with it, that I could at first hardly believe her serious. But I soon saw that she was. My evident pleasure pleased her; and without more ado we proceeded to trains and routes. The journey is easy enough. There is a station near the castle; and going one way one can reach it in ten hours; going another, one must sleep a night on the road. ‘The last way,’ she said, ‘was by far the most interesting, as it takes one through a beautiful part of Styria.’ I therefore selected that. I shall start the day after to-morrow; and the day after that I shall arrive at this mysterious castle.

“Yes—in three days I shall be in the heart of a strange country—and a country how strange!—how interesting! It is a country which always has haunted my imagination, owing to the fragments of description which from time to time I have heard of it. It is a country still of over-grown feudal households, where the retainers loyally kiss the hands of their masters; where bears and wild boars roam in forests, whose alleys are watched by keepers in plumed hats, and in whose recesses brigands hide themselves; where tribes of gipsies wander, and where gipsy bands play. It is a country which no doubt has known a political revolution, but no social revolution, or at the utmost only the shadow of one. Here is the past living still in the present. One crosses a Rubicon, and goes back a hundred and fifty years. Of course, to a certain extent, I write all this at random: the only Hungary that I know is the Hungary that I imagine. But I do not think, anyhow, I am wrong in expecting this—to inhale an atmosphere scented with the life of another century. Will not that be romance, as I said just now? Will it?—I shall fully appreciate it, if it is.

“At last—welcome! I feel it upon my eyelids—sleep. What an impartial author I must be, to go to sleep over my own productions—especially when the hero of them is myself!”

CHAPTER V.

WHEN Grenville laid down his pen it was nearly one o'clock. At the same time, a couple of nights later, he had already been for some hours on his way to his unknown prospects. As one o'clock was striking from bells hidden in the darkness, his servant Fritz, an Austrian, who knew the country thoroughly, and to whom he had committed the entire management of his journey, had just roused him up and extracted him from the drowsy twilight of a railway carriage—extracted him into a gust of night wind vaguely scented, and escorted him with his rugs and bags into the refreshment-room of some unknown junction.

"Our train," said Fritz, "does not go for an hour. Perhaps, excellency, you will allow me to order a little supper for you. "See," he said, taking a list of refreshments from a table, "this soup is good—you get it never in Vienna: these sausages are good; and this wine—you should taste that."

Partly by way of getting rid of the time, partly by way of acknowledging his servant's care for him, Grenville let his supper be ordered, and sat down to wait for it. Half awake as he was, the scene seemed like a dream to him. The air was hazy with gas-lit filaments of tobacco-smoke; odd-looking men with peaked caps and spectacles were beguiling their minutes with beer at little marble tables, whilst their luggage, mostly in the shape of miniature canvas portmanteaus, lay at their feet like dogs. Muffled women with bundles came and went, or drowsed wearily on red velvet benches. Coffee-machines with great brass domes gleamed at a long counter, and the walls, lined with pitch-pine, made a bare background for everything, chequered with advertisements of unfamiliar liqueurs and drinks. The whole place was charged with a sense of nocturnal travelling—of a fragment of active life strayed into regions of sleep.

Grenville ate his supper with curiosity rather than appetite, and then went out and smoked his cigar upon the platform. Near, in a valley, were the street-lights of some silent town; to the right and left were the scattered station buildings—masses of shadow starred with a coloured lamp or two; and

all around were hills covered with pine-forests, which showed in the dim moonlight their serrated outlines against the sky. Grenville was ignorant of the name, and even of the locality, of the station. All the country round was steeped in the charm of mystery. By and by some figures issued from the refreshment-room, crossing the rails to another platform beyond; and before long, with a rumbling moan out of the silence, came a lighted passenger train, sliding, and hissing, and arresting itself. A few moments more, and it had passed away like a somnambulist. Grenville looked at his watch, and his servant's voice at his ear said—

“Our train next. It comes here in five minutes. Here, excellency, is the station-master. He will keep a compartment, if he can, for you. I know him. His father was steward to the last Prince Plekonitz.”

Grenville turned round, and acknowledged the profound bow of a functionary, whose gold braid glittered and whose whiskers stivered with authority. A whistle pierced the night; there was another rumbling moan; and presently close to the group a procession of lighted windows, and shining sides of carriages bearing the word “Trieste” on them, moved and became stationary. The station-master was as good as his word. With much ceremony, after a little talk with the guard, he bowed Grenville into a reserved compartment, saying to the former as he did so, “His excellency alights at G——. —Your excellency will arrive there at half-past four in the morning.”

“Certainly,” said Grenville, smiling to himself, as he stretched himself out on the cushions, “I am an exception to the rule that no man is a hero to his valet. Fritz imagines me a minister of state already; and what is even more to the purpose, he communicates his own conception of me to his friends.”

The truth of this reflection was experienced even at G——, when in the chill obscurity of the station a commissionaire from the hotel, who had been joined by the guard the moment the train arrived, appeared at the door of the compartment, and assisted his excellency to descend. In these days everything has to be paid for; the bow of the departing guard indicated that he had been paid sufficiently; and Grenville before long, in a heavy rattling omnibus, was being shaken to pieces over the paving-stones of a dim angular street.

After lasting for ten minutes, this torture came to an end ; his vehicle halted abruptly under a huge resonant archway, and he presently found himself in an atmosphere of ghostly quiet, passing to his room by the gallery of a frescoed hall, one side of which was covered with a coat-of-arms, and bore the date of 1620.

"This inn, sir," said Fritz, as he opened his master's door, "is very old—more than two hundred years."

And so it well might be, thought Grenville, as he closed his eyes. Already, into the present, it seemed to his imagination that the past had projected a long fantastic shadow.

The dreams of sleep are killed by a bright morning. The dreams of our waking life take often a new vigour from it. So, next morning for Grenville, a thousand new fancies, all of them children of the same waking dreamland, came floating into his room as Fritz opened the windows, and admitted, in doing so, a breath of that faint unfamiliar smell which whispers to a stranger's nerves the news that he is in a strange city. As for G——, it is no doubt perfectly true that many an Englishman might roam through every street of it and be struck by nothing in any of them, excepting its inferiority to Bayswater ; but the minds of some men, if not their eyes, are colour-blind. To Grenville the very names over the shops, the conformation of the roofs and chimneys, and even the shape of the long primitive carts, were things which touched his imagination as a breeze touches the sea, and made it shiver into new colours. Fritz was his guide for an hour or so, and did the honours of the place for him. By the middle of the day he was once more in the train, and was speeding away from roofs and streets and chimneys, and piercing the country, beyond whose borders was Hungary.

And now, indeed, a duller imagination than his might have found excitement in the scenes which were pouring past him. All the backgrounds of all the romances of the world seemed to him to be suddenly turning into realities ; or else Nature itself seemed to be turning unreal, and to be receiving him into a universe of illusions. These mountains covered with interminable forests, these green winding valleys, with tiled hamlets gleaming in them, these deeply-rutted roads flanked with wayside crosses, these water-mills with the Middle Ages clinging to their cumbrous wheels—pictures of this kind, each seen for a minute or two, and vivified now and then by bright-

coloured rustic figures, came to Grenville all with a delightful magic about them—with an enchanted music like the overture to some new experience. What Englishman, even when travelling in his own country, has not at times felt something similar? Who, catching sight, through the moving windows of the railway-carriage, of some old orieled manor-house, half hidden amongst its avenues, has not seen in it the casket of some inaccessible novel, and imputed some breath of love to the slopes where the deer wander? And if this can be felt at home in our own modernized England, how would the feeling not be quickened in Styria—a land where the following vision presently startled Grenville?—an isolated rock, some thousand feet in height, scarred with precipices and fledged with enormous pines, amongst which gleamed an ascending line of towers, whilst crowning the summit was a castle spiked with pinnacles. Within view of this spectacle was a little wayside station at which the train stopped; so Grenville was able to assure himself that what he looked at really existed. The whole structure seemed perfect. Glass gleamed in the windows. The train moved on and his eyes became more expectant. By and by, nearer the line, a hunting-lodge peeped out of the forest, with a great black coronet daubed on its white plaster; then, far off, like a ship's mast on the horizon, one or two towers rose above a sea of pine-trees; then came a station, having a red-roofed town near, with gray fortifications, masked by a line of lindens; and then another village and wild forest.

Gradually, however, the aspect of things changed. The mountains died away into long, low-lying slopes; and at last the train was moving in a sea-like expanse of plain, edged at the remotest sky-line by low faint hills, cobalt-coloured. At first this transition tended to disappoint Grenville. Huge parallelograms of ploughland, alternating with waste and pasture, chilled his fancy with homely reminiscences of Lincolnshire; but by and by his eyes came to be conscious of various strange details, which once more enchanted everything. The names of the stations had become uncouth and alien; the words on the doors of the waiting-rooms and the offices were in an un-European language, suggesting no conjecturable meaning. Here and there on the plain, watching his wandering charge, was some solitary shepherd, or swineherd, grasping his long crook, and loosely covered with a capote of Oriental

fashion ; whilst above the roofs of villages islanded in sprouting orchards, the towers of the churches showed themselves with bulging Oriental domes. Grenville now knew where he was. Everything spoke of Hungary.

So the hours wore on, the prospect hardly changing itself, till at last the traveller, thrusting his head out of the window, descried in the distance a new distinguishing feature—an enormous poplar avenue straight as a line, crossing the whole landscape, and disappearing on each horizon. Watching this with a vague feeling of curiosity, he saw the trees grow more and more distinct ; soon, between them and him, a small town showed itself—a church, some rows of houses, and the chimney of an engine-house. Passing these, the train slackened its speed, and then stopped with a jerk at a dwarfed disconsolate station. Here, amongst a group of farmers and earth-stained peasants, was a figure whose presence distinguished this station from all the others—the figure of a footman, having a red cockade in his hat, and a long well-made overcoat, bright with immense gilt buttons. In a moment Fritz appeared at the carriage-door, and Grenville knew the journey was all but ended.

Outside the gate were waiting a spruce-looking brougham and a high outlandish break, with some wild-eyed gipsies staring at them. Grenville was presently at home amongst the civilized cushions of the former ; and the horses, at the sound of the whip, plunged forward impetuously. One incongruous sensation at once surprised and amused him, and that was the rocking and jolting of the eminently well-hung vehicle, which told a refreshing tale of the savage character of the road. In a few minutes a sharp turn was taken, and then he saw he was in the great poplar avenue. On each side was a deep irregular ditch, beyond were glimpses of tiled barns and cottages, and ahead of him in the distance, it seemed that the road was blocked by some vague masses of building, on which something or other glittered. In due time all this explained itself. The brougham was approaching a long buff-coloured wall, built of stone elaborately dressed, and enriched with cyphers at intervals ; and in the middle of this was a florid Italian gateway, high over which was lifted a gilded princely coronet. Some doors were opened ; a man in a green livery raised a hat adorned with plumes to the carriage ; bare-footed women were visible, grubbing in unkept flower-beds ; then came shadow and echo, and the horses tramped under an

archway ; they crossed a well-like court surrounded by walls and windows, and drew up under a second archway beyond. Here on a step was standing a majestic porter, with gold lace on his coat and a gold-headed sceptre in his hand. Through the door behind him was visible a great ascending staircase, on which were stationed several liveried servants, a wizened little dwarf, who might have been either sixteen or sixty, and a steward who would have done honour to any German melodrama, as he smiled and blinked a respectful benediction on the scene. Grenville feared for a moment that they would all of them be kissing his hand—an act which, though he approved of it in theory, would, he felt, be embarrassing in practice. As a matter of fact, however, they merely muttered something and bowed, and somehow or other between them conducted him up the staircase. This was not unlike the staircase of a palace at Genoa. There was the same spaciousness, the same fine proportions, though the stairs and balustrades were of coarse stone, not marble, and the walls were rudely whitewashed. But a life-size portrait of Maria Theresa was on one side, a cardinal simpered superb benevolence on the other, and facing the landing was a wigged general under a canopy, turning a velvet shoulder to an army being massacred in the background. Grenville found at this point that the dwarf alone was conducting him. He was ushered through two bare ante-rooms, whose walls were dingy with pictures. A farther door was opened. He heard a voice that he recognized ; and the Princess, full of smiles, was greeting him in a good-sized drawing-room. Here everything had an oddly familiar look—tables, carpet, and sofas. It all suggested England—only an England just robbed of its comfort. There was English comfort, however, in the sight of the tea-table ready for him ; and he and the Princess were soon happily seated with nothing between them but a service of old Vienna china.

“You mustn’t be frightened,” she said, “at finding me alone. Some time next week there will be a few people coming—Count C——, perhaps, who was once Ambassador in London ; and a nice little niece of mine with two angels of children. To-night, too, at dinner, I have company for you in the shape of the priest. He talks nothing but Hungarian, so I must be his interpreter. Poor man—this will make his conversation go farther than usual. I have taken you at your

word, you see. You will have little here to amuse you but the things you told me you cared about, which, if I remember right, are the old, the dull, and the unaccustomed. Come," she exclaimed, "there is still some light left. Open the window, and take a look outside."

He did as she asked, and they emerged on the leaded roof of a portico. The scene was curious. Below was an enormous space, dotted with groups of servants, children, and poultry, which was enclosed by ranges of pillared and symmetrical out-buildings, and had in the middle a grass-plot, encircling a monumental obelisk. Directly opposite was an entrance guarded by two great statues; and beyond these was the poplar avenue, whose slim vista reached away into the twilight.

"That avenue," said the Princess, "was made by my husband's grandfather, to form a link between two distant properties. On that side it goes for more than sixty miles, and sixteen on the other, by which you came from the station; and this castle is stuck on it like a piece of meat on a skewer. On the right is our town—you would call it a village; on the other the park, into which your bedroom looks; and north and south are our woods and plains and poplars. That great building is a riding-school; its fellow that faces it is a ball-room; and those two things like temples on each side of the entrance—coachmen and gardeners live now in them; but forty years back they were the barracks of a guard of honour. Yes," she said, looking at him with an amused twinkle in her eyes, "we have only just ceased to be interesting savages. I hope you'll discover to-morrow that we're not quite civilized yet. Look," she went on, raising her glasses to her eyes. The gates had opened. A carriage with four rough horses wheeled in, and drew up at a distant door. "That," said the Princess, "must be our architect and our agent. They went this morning to a village nearly thirty miles away. Hark! there's the bell, which means it is half-past six. We dine at seven. I will have you shown to your room. Don't dress; put on merely a morning coat; and listen—one piece of advice; take your hat with you, and wear it in these cold passages."

The dwarf, who was found in the ante-room, and who seemed a kind of groom-of-the-chambers, actually had Grenville's hat ready for him; and guiding him down the stairs to

a vaulted corridor on a entresol, landed him at last in a bedroom that was vaulted also, though the curves of the roof, as well as the walls, were incongruously covered with a gaudy but faded paper. Having made the toilette enjoined him, Grenville retraced his steps, and found the Princess and the priest already awaiting him in the drawing-room. The priest rose deferentially and, with both hands on his stomach, made a bend of the body towards him which obviously aimed at being a bow. The Princess rattled through a bilingual introduction, and then said, "Take your hats, and let us come in to dinner." They passed out through the ante-room, across the head of the staircase, and presently reached a large circular chamber, rudely frescoed, so as to look like a ruinous temple, with a broken dome for its roof, and fern sprouting out of its walls.

Compared with an English dinner the repast was primitively simple. The dishes were few, and each was presented twice; there was nothing on the table but a dish of pears, and biscuits; and there was one wine only—a red wine of the country. To Grenville, fresh from the luxuries of Vienna and London, all this seemed like a happy retrogression into shadowland; and the number of clumsily reverential servants who shuffled round so bare a board deepened this vague impression. A mere accident deepened it yet further. The Princess worked industriously as interpreter between the priest and Grenville; but presently Grenville, feeling that he cut rather a helpless figure, asked if the priest was able to talk Latin. The good man's face at once lighted up, and a smile widened the curve of his smooth overflowing cheeks. With his knife arrested an inch in front of his mouth, he emitted first a cough, and then a few halting words, which Grenville barely recognized through their unaccustomed pronunciation, but to which, however, he bravely responded by some others, imitating as well as he could the pronunciation of his neighbour. In the course of a few minutes the two began just to understand each other. As time went on they got more shameless and confident, and gradually casting to the winds all reverence for grammatical virtue, they became intelligible as they ceased to attempt correctness. The Princess was delighted. She asked in Hungarian and English what they were saying, and by and by she was informed that they had got on the subject of the castle. The castle to the priest was

the most magnificent object in the universe ; and he evidently felt a kind of personal pride in recounting to a stranger all the wonders contained in it. Moreover as this kind of catalogue obviated the necessity for verbs, he continued it in the drawing-room till the early hour arrived for him and his cassock to bow themselves out and vanish. "*Theatrum—scena—proscenium—*" these were some of the echoes left by him in his listener's ears—" *arma cum multis gemmis—arma antiquissima—documenta—libri—medii ævi reliquæ—mirabilia multa—permulta—admiranda ! Sylvæ—cervi—latifundia prodigiosa.*"

CHAPTER VI.

THE expectations which Grenville took that night to bed with him were well fulfilled by his experience the following week ; nor did he, although he had no company but his hostess, feel so much as an hour of dullness or disappointment. New impressions were invading him every moment, delighting and exhilarating his imagination, and surprising him all the more from the way in which they answered his expectations.

He woke next morning, under the vaulted roof of his chamber, to find his coffee at his bedside in exquisite old pink china. When he was dressing, he looked out on the park with its giant trees, and saw how it was planted after the stately fashion of Versailles, in long alleys that radiated from an open space in the centre. He threw his windows wide, and there came an influx of air which had all the warmth of summer and all the freshness of spring ; and he stole out early down a narrow winding staircase, and wandered at will amongst the huge trunks and primroses, treading on moss, and watching the roofs and outlines of the castle.

Every morning he did the same, moving about like a solitary human being in fairy-land. Wherever he turned was something with the stamp of the old *régime* on it. There was a long orangery built in the seventeenth century ; a kitchen-garden with forcing-houses hardly later in date ; and as to the castle itself, its newest parts or features—the great courtyard which was meant

to be grandly classical—some Corinthian pilasters stuck against mediæval walls, and some Italian vases stuck on mediæval parapets—these were the work of a lady, not a Princess Plekonitz, whom a Prince Plekonitz had imported here from the court of Louis Quatorze. Grenville each morning saw them all, with the dew on them ; whilst on every side of him the innumerable buds of spring swelled and brightened into one growing illumination of green.

Then, too, within-doors, a whole world unfolded its secrets—rooms that were dim with pictures of wars on the Turkish borders, of falling flags with the crescent on them, and savage turbaned heads being severed by Hungarian sabres. He peeped into the ball-room of which the Princess had spoken, and was surprised at its deserted splendour. It was a hundred feet in length—a hall with a frescoed roof, which rested on marble columns, and had rows of chandeliers dangling from it. The old steward lured him up many dusty stairs, and introduced him to a veritable museum hidden in the topmost story. Here were whitewashed walls, festooned with jewelled saddle-cloths of crimson and green velvet—the plunder of Moslem camps. In one room were antique saddles, of which some had emeralds in their stirrups ; in another was battered armour, and great rusty lances ; in another matchlocks and models of old artillery ; and in another a pile of faded Turkish pavilions. Then, again, under rafters that smelt of cobwebs, were worm-eaten presses whose contents exhaled a different sentiment—dies for money, which the princes once had the right of coining ; toys of forgotten children ; rapiers with tarnished handles, rouge-pots, velvet masks, and fragments of broken fans—withered petals of the gaiety of a lost century. Nor was this all. There were ponderous quaint portmanteaus, which had rumbled their last on wheels before the French Revolution ; a chest with a service in it of metal plates and dishes, for the use of some prince when he halted at wayside inns—objects which whispered of coaches with blazoned panels, armed retinues, and long robber-haunted roads. Nor was the priest's boast a vain one when he spoke of old documents, and of a theatre. There was in the basement a series of vaulted chambers, stacked with papers and parchments, like trusses of brown hay, which made Grenville feel as if all the past were breathing at him ; and above the drawing-room was a high saloon full of silence, where a regular stage stood with all its scenery, in the same condition

as when actors had last trodden it, on a certain gay festival ninety years ago.

He had little temptation at first to wander beyond the precincts, the castle and its grounds offering quite enough to amuse him ; but occasional glimpses which he caught of the outer world made a fitting frame for the things with which he had grown familiar. The windows of the library commanded the square of the little town, which the second day of his visit was thronged with a many-coloured fair, the whole area being tessellated with the costumes of peasants and gipsies. A day or two later he saw the same open space perambulated by a procession bearing tapers, crosses, and censers, and led by chanting priests, whose vestments twinkled in the daylight ; and beyond the fences of the park he gradually came to realize that there were plains where buffaloes fed, and wandering flocks of sheep—sheep with shepherds playing on pastoral pipes to them.

The Princess, who had lived so long in her adopted country that anything strange about it had by this time worn away, began to feel, when her guest described his impressions to her, that she saw it with fresh eyes again, and her interest in it was revived by his. The warmth of the nights—warm like an English June—would charm them after dinner away from the lighted drawing-room, and keep them outside, sitting on the roof of the portico, whilst the Princess poured into his ears accounts of the life surrounding them—telling him of the robbers that still haunted the country, hiding themselves in the enormous forests ; of castles on plain and crag, and the ghosts and legends belonging to them ; of the shameless tyrannies of some of the smaller rural magnates, of the almost royal isolation of the more important families, of their tapestried halls, their innumerable horses, their boar-hunts, and their wild foresters ; and sometimes she alluded to a possession of the house of Plekonitz, which she said that Grenville ought by and by to see—a half-ruined castle on a rock, not sixteen miles away, with quarters in it for a thousand troops, with endless subterranean galleries, with towers full of old portraits, hangings, and crystal goblets ; and with a guard-room arched like a cathedral, called "The Hall of the Cannon." And meanwhile, from a tavern beyond the lodge, would float with a dreamy wildness the music of a gipsy band ; the moon, rising above the blossoming horse-chestnuts of the park, would make

in their branches a mist of milky lamp-light, and out of the thickets beyond would thrill the first notes of the nightingale.

But at last came a day of rain ; and then Grenville betook himself to a region which as yet he had quite neglected—the library. The bulk of the books were French—books of the last century, and many of them were extremely curious. There were quaint guides to old-world watering-places ; quaint treatises on old-world household economy ; and others, without number, on building, containing plans and pictures of mansions in the Faubourg St. Germain, and of châteaux in the days of their glory. In addition to these he found a collection of tall folios, which were full of superb engravings, illustrating, in the most minute way, the life of Paris and Vienna, from the street to the royal bedroom.

These the Princess had never seen before, and her pleasure knew no bounds. She and Grenville, before they went to bed, would spend an hour in turning them over like children. Brilliant balls, banquets, and royal card-parties, fanciful out-door *fêtes*, hunting scenes, and processions, all drawn from life with the most exact minuteness, were revealed before them on the splendid unwieldy pages. The gilded chariots seemed to rattle as they looked at them, the flowers to be sprouting in the alleys of the grandiose gardens, and they heard on the towering hedges the clink of the gardener's shears. But Grenville at last discovered something better even than this. It was a little oblong volume in tattered and dirty calf, which he chanced to unearth, and opened with very faint curiosity. But when he opened it he found it the identical thing which he had wished for secretly, without imagining it existed. It was a collection of engravings published two hundred years ago, of the castles of Hungary and Styria, showing them as they then were. The superb folios at once ceased to interest him, and his imagination gave itself entirely to these strange romantic dwellings. Some were perched on curious rocks like birds' nests, some hung with their turrets over little clustering villages, some stood in great woodlands, solitary. But all had the same peculiar air about them, distinct from anything known to Western Europe. They were all of them mansions or palaces incorporated with the feudal stronghold, not as if this last were the work of a dead antiquity, but as being obviously a part of the real life of the time. There were Italian gardens hidden behind cannon and watch-towers, Italian gateways

flanked by walls loopholed for musketry, and travelling carriages issuing out under the teeth of the raised portcullis.

And now came the question, where were these castles situated? And which of them, if any, could Grenville manage to visit? The Princess understood his enthusiasm, but she could give him little information. She accordingly sent for the agent; she submitted the book to him, and catechized him carefully as to its contents. Of many of the castles he naturally knew nothing; but a dozen or more, belonging to the adjacent region, he at once identified, and could say something about them. Several of these he knew to be complete ruins, but three or four of them—and they happened to be amongst the most singular—he said were standing much as the pictures showed them, and he engaged to find out how they might best be visited.

One excursion, indeed, was arranged at once, and that was to the castle of which the Princess had herself spoken. A light carriage and four were put at Grenville's disposal. Early one morning the horses stamped under the archway, the porter in his gold lace and his robes superintended the start, and past the lodges, and beneath the glittering coronet, Grenville sped away into the level limitless landscape, inhaling the smell and freshness of the half-oriental spring. He came back in the evening enchanted with what he had seen. Everything—at all events so it seemed to him—had realized the dreams with which the Princess and the book had been filling him—the peasants who lifted their shaggy caps to him as he passed, the forests through which the road had taken him, where gipsy bands camped in clearings, and where woodcutters on the borders of the shadow were busy over the raw red timber, the absence of anything like a modern middle-class dwelling, and above all the appearance of the villages, had spoken of a primitive world, lost to Western Europe—a world picturesque with all its old inequalities unquestioned, in which, if the rich had changed as little as the poor, he would himself have been driving in a chariot, and been wearing ruffles and a periwig. As for the village at the foot of the castle he was bound for, it was still surrounded by its old fortified walls, and one side of its square was occupied by a barn-like monastery; whilst the castle above, whose ragged walls looked down on it, was reached by a line of ascending towers and guard-rooms, where the iron doors still swung in

the shadow ; and Grenville had found, in its wilderness of half-roofless masonry, not only the bric-à-brac of which the Princess had spoken, but a great banqueting-hall high over a lofty chapel ; and in it its old oak table, surrounded by carved chairs, sideboards adorned with trays of dim oriental lacquer, and breast-plates and rusty helmets looking down on it all.

"I should hardly have been surprised," he said that evening to the Princess, "if Frederick Barbarossa or King Arthur had been sitting at that table with their followers."

"Well," said the Princess, "I am glad you have enjoyed yourself ; and now I have got a piece of good news with which to welcome you. The agent has been with me to-day, and has arranged two more expeditions for you—to castles as large as this one, and, he says, not ruined at all. To see them, however, you must sleep for a couple of nights at a little town about thirty miles away. So as one or two people are coming here almost directly, you had better, perhaps, calm your impatience, and wait until they are gone. Remember," she added, "there are my little grand-nieces and their mother. For my sake you must stay and admire these. And then, as I told you before, there will also be Count C——. He knows Hungary thoroughly, and he was for some years at Constantinople : so for every reason you ought to be here to meet him."

"Nothing," said Grenville, "could please me or suit me better. A parcel of letters, I find, has come to me from Vienna. They will want a good deal of answering, and I shall be glad of a few days' quiet."

CHAPTER VII.

GRENVILLE's letters were indeed a formidable budget ; and when, during the next few days, he set himself to consider and answer them, he found himself troubled by misgivings which he certainly had not anticipated. Most of the letters dealt with official business, or political matters connected with it : and, regard being had to the character of the ministers who wrote them, the tone of them all, even more than the

matter, was flattering. Some of them especially were so plain-spoken and confidential, that Grenville's cheek, as he read, grew warm with a pulse of vanity, and his heart throbbed with the sense that he was really a rising man. But yet, as he sat in the window of his vaulted bed-room, writing his lucid answers to them, and feeling his power in doing so, he was aware that his mind was less in his work than formerly. The thought of his strange surroundings would be continually coming to him, like boys' thoughts of their holidays disturbing them at their Greek declensions, and would touch his nerves as a perfume might—a delightful consciousness of the castle with its ancient passages, of the Turkish spoils, the rouge-pots, the velvet masks—of the primitive villages, the forests and the great pastoral plains: and they seemed to whisper of a life on which he had turned his back. All appealed to him like a wild breath of romance; and romance showed itself as a more attractive thing than reality. In fact he now understood, for the first time fully, the degree to which his present existence had touched and stirred his imagination, and how susceptible he still was to the power of that magical faculty. In itself the experience was a delightful one; but as he thought it over, it began to alarm and trouble him.

"Am I," he asked himself, "merely a dreamer after all? And am I tiring of practical work before I have well begun it? Romance, and philosophy, which is merely the romance of the intellect—I was useless for so many years because I gave myself up to these. They made me expect everything, and consequently do nothing. Is this one of these Sirens once again tempting me, calling me away from the narrow path of achievement, into the wide land of enchantment, the paradise of possibilities? To have a strong will one must have a narrow imagination. Is *my* imagination once more making a fool of me?"

Reflection, however, ended in reassuring him; and having first confided to his diary the general character of his doubts, with a half-cynical laugh he formulated his answers to them as follows—

"No," he wrote, "when I come to think it over dispassionately, all the romance which this country suggests to me—all the futile dreaming which gives me so much pleasure, does not weaken my practical resolution to work, but rather stimulates it; and, to speak the bald and simple truth, I

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believe the reason to be this. All work in the world, except religious work, amongst its motives always has ambition for one of them; and if any one says this is not true in his own case, it merely means that his ambition is a kind of ambition he is ashamed of. Now ambition is essentially an appreciation of some prize that the world can give one; and that prize, in every case, no matter how its true character may be hidden, and how much we may disguise it from ourselves, is some position securing for us some exceptional social tribute, either of submission, welcome, or hostility. This is the crown of wild-olive, which even the race for money is run for; and the vulgarest of ambitious men values money only for the sake of it. Well, such being the case, my own feeling is this—it is only when the constitution of society is openly and avowedly aristocratic that ambition can be gentlemanly or even honest; and under such conditions it is enlarged, chastened and ennobled by being shared with a family or with a class. But an ambitious democrat is bound to achieve his elevation by making a trade of saying that he does not wish to be elevated. And then, when he does achieve it, what a ridiculous elevation it is! The aristocrat has a position which asserts his greatness for him; the democrat is a social monstrosity who has always to be asserting it for himself. He is like a man who, instead of having his wealth in lands and dependants, is bound to carry and exhibit it on his own person; or he is like a man chaired by a mob, and every moment in danger of being upset by it: whilst a really noble position is not elevation merely; it is as composite and special a thing as a really noble picture. But in this country, it seems, there are neither mobs nor democrats. This castle, were it in England, would no doubt seem rude and uncomfortable; but its towers, and its courts, have here no other dwellings which can rival them, or confuse their meaning by belonging to a different class of owners. And it is just in the same way here that the spirit of aristocracy survives, not really perhaps with more vigour than in England, but with nothing, so far as a stranger sees, to question it. One feels it here as one does not feel it there; it restores to life a lost picturesqueness and brilliance; it makes the mountains grander, the valleys more peaceful, and the world it makes a place that seems better worth succeeding in. I laugh," he added, "to think how many excellent people would exclaim against this view,

and call it the 'quintessence of vulgarity.' Poor excellent people! Let them call it what they will. It is merely a question of names. Vulgarity is their name for what wounds their own self-love."

If these feelings were strong when he wrote them down—and they were strong no matter how he laughed at them—they were destined the following day to be strengthened still further. The Princess, when Grenville met her at luncheon, struck him at once as not being quite herself. Her manner had a sort of constraint and importance in it which he had never before noticed. Presently she came out with the following piece of information—that the Count and Countess were coming that afternoon. "Irma Schilizzi," she added, "has put me off till to-morrow." Then with a voice that suddenly became sharp, as if she were impressing some severe fact on her listener, "The Count and Countess," she said, "as of course you know, are amongst the greatest—the very greatest—people in Vienna. It's a pity they were in London before your time, and that therefore you do not know them."

What all this meant Grenville could not at first imagine, but presently he got at the bottom of it.

"The Count and I," continued the Princess, "are very old friends. We always get on famously. As for her—well, her manners can be charming, when she likes. I must say that for all the Austrian great ladies; and here of course she'll be civil. But——" The Princess paused.

"Yes," said Grenville. "But what?"

The Princess gave a little ironical laugh.

"You don't know Vienna," she said, "I do. Listen to me, Bobby Grenville, and I'll tell you what will perhaps amuse you. You see what I am—the widow of the greatest magnate in Hungary; and foreigner though I am, I can tell you that at Buda-Pesth I am as great a lady as any one. Perhaps I am even the greatest. But at Vienna I shouldn't be so much as received in society. And yet, think of this. My mother belonged to one of the oldest families in England; and her mother was the daughter of an English duke. But my father and his father happened to be brewers at Liverpool—only merchant princes, and great Liberal statesmen; and at Vienna, I tell you without exaggeration, I should be nobody—nobody—nobody! These Austrian countesses and princesses—However, there's no use talking about it. As you didn't know

this one in London, see how she treats *you*. I never knew till this morning that there was any question of her coming; but it seems she's on her way to some place, so she makes this house a convenience."

Grenville saw that this subject was a sore one with her, though she herself had started it; so he said abruptly, by way of turning the conversation—

"And who is Irma Schilizzi, who you said is coming to-morrow?"

"My niece—my niece," said the Princess, a little impatiently. "I suppose I am stupid, and didn't tell you her name. There is a case in point. She lives in Vienna sometimes. Her husband has business there. He is one of a firm of engineers. He is very rich; he has done some great works for the Emperor; and so his name is perfectly well known. Now as for getting into Viennese society, my niece would as soon think of trying to get to the moon. But to her the Countess will be not only civil but charming. She considers the distance between them to be so immense and acknowledged, that she will be almost as nice to her as she might be to a favourite maid. These people—I tell you you'll be able to see it for yourself—can be charming to those whom they acknowledge their equals, and also to those who acknowledge themselves their inferiors; but to others, their insolence is something which an Englishman could hardly believe in; though to a vulgar fine lady in London it would be a fortune, if only she could imitate it. And it's all the more insolent because they seem to be unaware of it. Not that I care," added the Princess, with true feminine veracity. "Perhaps she'll amuse you. She's handsome, but very stupid."

One of the Princess's observations slightly annoyed Grenville. The Countess might have a contempt for brewers and brewers' children; but he saw no reason why he should be classed along with them. He was happy in the consciousness of possessing thirty-two unimpeachable quarterings; and in his own estimation his blood was as pure as the Countess's own. But in spite of this, or perhaps because of it, what the Princess had said raised in him some misgiving as to whether the Countess would take him at his true value; and his vanity began to annoy him with various imagined ways in which she might place him in a false position and humiliate him.

This formidable lady and her husband arrived about five o'clock. Entering the drawing-room Grenville found them at tea ; and after all he had heard, he watched them with some interest. The Count, a handsome man, who looked about sixty-five, with his frank expression and carefully-trimmed beard, had all the air and manner of a high-bred fashionable Englishman. The Countess was a slim woman, who had many remains of beauty, and evidently a Parisian maid ; and she was prattling to the Princess with all the lightness of a girl, in a quick alternation of German, French, and English.

The Count, when Grenville was introduced, greeted him with the greatest cordiality. For that indeed he was prepared ; but the greeting of the Countess was a surprise to him. She turned towards him with a bright twinkle of welcome, which seemed to gleam on him from her eyes, her lips, and her bracelets.

"Mr. Grenville," she said, in the prettiest foreign accent, "I didn't know we were going to find you here. We were so sorry, the Count and I, not to have met you at Vienna. Dear Princess, let Mr. Grenville sit by me. Perhaps you'll allow him just to move the tea-table."

Grenville experienced two conflicting emotions. He would hardly have been human if he had not felt somewhat flattered at being distinguished thus by a lady whom he had been told he would find so *difficile*. But another emotion, which he was far more keenly conscious of, was annoyance for the sake of the Princess, who he felt, in spite of her kindness, would be mortified for several reasons at this falsification of her prophecies. He honestly wished that the Countess would begin to be rude to him ; he did as little as possible to meet her friendly advances ; and he carefully kept from looking towards the Princess, for fear she should think he was asking her to remark his conquest. By and by, however, the Countess suddenly said to him, "And, Mr. Grenville, how beautiful they are, those poems of yours ! Your Ambassador lent them to me. I think there is real passion in them." Grenville's eyes, in modesty, wandered away from the speaker, and they fell by accident full on those of the Princess. He was puzzled by seeing in these no signs of annoyance, but a knowing smile which said to him, "Isn't it as I told you ?" What she could mean by this he was quite unable to conjecture ; but the moment the Count and Countess were taken to see their

bedrooms, she explained it by saying to him with a little friendly malice, "Don't you notice how she takes you for a man of letters, and patronizes you?"

"Well," said Grenville, with a really generous effort, "perhaps she does. I confess I did feel patronized."

The Princess laughed, delighted, and rubbed her hands together. "Ah," she said, "didn't I tell you so? That's Vienna all over."

Grenville, though uneasily wondering whether the Princess might not be right, was pleased to think that the mischief, which he had been fearing, was got rid of; but, as fate would have it, at dinner it all began again. The conversation turned at first on various royal marriages, and then on the general gossip of half the courts of Europe. Nothing in the world could have suited the Princess better. Of Rome and St. Petersburg she knew far more than the Countess, and despite her opinion of the Austrian *haute noblesse*, she had the *Almanach de Gotha* well at her fingers' ends. Then presently, when the Countess, who loved jewellery like a child, said to her, "Oh, *mon Dieu*, what a beautiful brooch that is of yours!" she achieved a genuine triumph in being able to answer thus: "The Queen of England gave it me. She was fond of me for the sake of my grandmother."

"Yes," said the Count to his wife, anxious to make things pleasant, "the Princess was always a great favourite with the Queen."

"I know England so little," said the Countess, turning to Grenville, and dropping the subject of her hostess's royal friendship, as if putting down a piece of china that had been put into her hands unasked. "I only married my husband during his last year in London. I stayed one autumn, however, at several of your beautiful châteaux. Compared with you English, we poor people are barbarous."

"On the contrary," said Grenville, "I hear your châteaux are splendid. Country life in Austria has always particularly interested me."

The Princess, imagining that Grenville was still feeling patronized, was anxious now to speak up for her guest's dignity.

"Mr. Grenville," she interposed, "has a beautiful château of his own."

"Ah," said the Countess, laughing gaily, "to be sure he

has. We have been there; we have seen it. We were staying with Lord Solway, close by, and he drove us through the enchanting park. You don't live there? No? I was told it was let to some rich *bourgeois*. But we went in. We saw your old family pictures. There were rooms—galleries—full of them. So, Mr. Grenville, you find we know all about you; and your Ambassador said at Vienna that you will be such a great man. You ought to be great," she went on, with an almost coquettish friendliness. "I am not laughing—no. It is written in your eyes—I am a physiognomist."

Grenville felt that the Princess was taking in every word; but later in the evening he hoped she was out of hearing, when the Count, who treated him with equally marked distinction, offered to give him this and that introduction to obnoxious grandees, the despisers of brewers' daughters, in case he should really wish to see country life in Austria. The Princess, however, had managed to hear everything; but her nature was really far too genial and dignified to allow her to harbour any petty sense of annoyance; and she only indulged in the solace which an angel could hardly have grudged her, of trying to make it appear that everything had happened as she predicted.

"Did you notice," she said, "they treat you as one of themselves? You see the reason; they happen to know your pedigree—I dare say better than you know it yourself. Isn't it just as I told you? Only I didn't think it would come out so soon. Well, the Countess is satisfied that your blood is blue. She never forgets that mine has malt and hops in it."

"My dear Princess," said Grenville, "I'm sure you are wrong there. This lady seems to me to treat you as her intimate friend."

"Pooh!" retorted the Princess, laughing, as she said good-night to him. "Civility with many fine ladies is merely the grammar of impertinence."

The whole of these incidents, though in some ways they flattered Grenville, yet in others jarred on him unpleasantly. He was genuinely sorry for his hostess on account of the sense of indignity from which he knew she was suffering, and with which he could sympathize, as at first he had been apprehensive that he might have to share it himself; but he was annoyed with her at the same time for having confided her grievance to him. It was a grievance which seemed so unsuited to this

remote princely castle, and the stately and old-world life which he liked to think survived in it. It disturbed his pleasant illusions, as a noise might disturb a dream.

In this mood of mind the society of the Count and Countess gave him a pleasure, by contrast, which he could not help feeling, but for which he reproached himself, as if it savoured of treachery. They, in every way, suited the castle absolutely. What the castle was to the country, they were to life. The position which they instinctively assigned to themselves suggested no invidious comparison with mere ordinary mortals; it seemed based on the assumption that there could be no comparison at all. And the result was, to Grenville, charming. There was a soothing calm about them, especially about their social judgments, which said that for them a social grievance would be impossible; and further, they showed not only perfect taste, but the kindness that comes to people for whom acrimony could never be a necessity. In the Count, too, he noticed a certain chivalrous discrimination, even with regard to the Princess's niece—a mere *bourgeoise*—the wife of an engineer.

"We met her here last year," he said; "a pretty refined woman."

"Yes," said the Countess, carelessly, "her mother, I think, was noble."

"You would quite get the impression," the Count continued to Grenville, "that she had made a *mésalliance* in marrying this Schilizzi—a Levantine. But he's rich. In Vienna alone he must have made a large fortune, and the Princess told me he had a grand villa at Hampstead; so perhaps by this time in London he's a man of fashion and a courtier."

In these last words was a dryness that spoke volumes. Shortly afterwards the Countess, with a pleasant smile, happened to say of the Princess, "So clever, so nice, so good she is."

These words spoke their volumes also. Grenville now detected the note of instinctive patronage, and was certainly glad that he was not himself its victim. The sense that he was not—the sense that these two fastidious aristocrats, whilst patronizing others, saw in himself an equal, had not only saved him from an anticipated mortification, but was now giving him, in his own eyes, a certain increased importance, the very nature of which he would hardly have understood at

home, or which at home he would certainly have thought ridiculous. He was indeed conscious of something ridiculous in it, even here; but for reasons which will be dwelt on presently, he yielded to it—he could not resist it.

Presently, however, an incident happened which, though it did not change his mind, made him reproach, and even despise himself for indulging it. Mme. Schilizzi arrived—a pretty, clear-eyed blonde, somewhat timid in manner, but perfectly well-bred; graceful in figure, and almost too beautifully dressed. Grenville was by instinct always attentive to women, even to those who appealed to nothing beyond his kindness. And here was a woman to whom, under other circumstances, he would certainly have found it pleasant to pay some common attention. Indeed he did attend to her, as it was; he did his duty conscientiously—seating himself by her when he was introduced to her, and talking to her about her journey. But all the while he felt the Count and Countess had lent their supercilious vision to him; and his eyes persisted in seeing in her not a pleasing acquaintance, but merely the *bourgeois*' wife—a person beyond the pale of intimacy. Nor were matters mended when at dinner she shyly spoke to him about London, and he found that her ideas were confined to Hampstead and Bayswater; though seeing how conscious she was of the narrowness of her own experience, he was a little touched by the simplicity with which she acknowledged it. He knew when, that night, he reflected on how he had behaved to her—he knew that externally he had shown her no want of politeness; but to talk to her had been an effort, and he despised himself for the feeling that made it so.

And yet the feeling perversely refused to vanish; and indeed next morning it inclined rather to confirm itself. The Princess was occupied with her matters of daily business. Mrs. Schilizzi had retired to the company of her children, and the Count and Countess invited him to come for a walk with them in the park. He felt as he went—their manner subtly made him feel—as if there were between them some unmentioned social freemasonry, separating them from others near them; and no public adulation could have flattered him so much as this silent understanding. They tried to give him every information he asked for; they renewed their offers of various useful introductions, especially one to Count T——, a great territorial magnate, who lived in the neighbourhood of

the castle he was about to visit; and thinking over their charm of manner, their kindness, and their perfect taste, and realizing that their pride was a dagger which they kept in a velvet sheath, and would never draw unless some one ventured to attack them, he said to himself that a pride which he shared with them could not after all be so very absurd or vulgar.

In the afternoon they departed. The Princess, when she had seen the last of them, asked Grenville to join with her in her relief at being rid of the lady; and calling the children and her niece to her, began to laugh and talk with them, as if a weight had been lifted from her mind suddenly. He, however, was conscious of a certain blankness. He had a feeling as if his natural allies had deserted him, and had left him in a position more or less false amongst strangers. But his spirits revived when the Princess, with great good-humour, returned during dinner to the subject of his proposed expeditions, and arranged that he should start as soon as he felt inclined. "Irma," she said, "goes in a week or so; she is waiting to hear from her doctor about a little watering-place between this and Buda-Pesth, to which she wishes to take her children. They are both delicate; neither Vienna nor this place suits them. Had your two ways only lain in the same direction, you might have waited and taken charge of her."

Grenville was not sorry that this plan was impracticable. He had lost his sense of happiness in the castle; and that evening he wrote as follows in his diary—"The whole plan of my expedition has been settled. On Thursday next I will start. The change has come just when it was most wanted. The grievances of my kind friend the Princess against Viennese society, and the talk and the smart dresses of the young grass-widow from Hampstead, whose husband it seems is at Smyrna making a railway, were beginning to interfere with the charm which this place had for me—to interfere with it before I had half realized it. But all will be set to rights by a few days of isolation.

"By the way, I ought to be highly pleased with myself. I find I am famous. To my surprise Mrs. Schilizzi has read my poetry. She told me so this evening. I was not very responsive. I hope she will not embarrass me by praising me to my face again."

With regard to this point he need have been under no uneasiness. Mrs. Schilizzi, as any one might have seen who watched her, was far too sensitively timid to risk a second repulse; and though not showing the smallest pique at his treatment, she was shy in his presence, and showed some difficulty in talking to him. He again blamed himself for the perversity of his previous temper. Here he was shut up with two women, and he could not feel or act quite as he wished towards either. He hated to feel himself an unsympathizing critic of his hostess, and a supercilious critic of her niece, whom he gradually saw to be prettier than at first he thought she was. Her eyes would have pleased Greuze; her dresses would have pleased Worth; her complexion would have pleased anybody. But he could not help measuring her by the Countess's Viennese standard; he felt her not to belong to the same world as himself; and the signs of refinement and thought in her by which he was sometimes struck, merely surprised, and did nothing toward attracting, him.

The very next morning for instance, when he was turning over some books in the library, she happened to enter without at first seeing him, and with obvious curiosity began to inspect the shelves. Grenville's only thought was, "What on earth can she want here?" The moment she saw him she started and blushed crimson.

"I'm so sorry," she said; "I didn't mean to disturb you."

She certainly did disturb him; but, seeing that she turned to go, the whole of his good-nature was up in arms to reassure her.

"Can I," he said kindly, "help you to look for anything? There's nothing here, I'm afraid, that's very new or amusing."

"I like old books," she faltered, "though I dare say I don't understand them. What I wanted to look at was the castles you showed the Princess."

Grenville produced the volume, and turned over the leaves with her. She seemed unnecessarily grateful for his politeness, and was profuse in her exclamations of interest. The exclamations annoyed him, and he asked her, by way of checking them, if, connected as she was with the country, she had seen any of these places herself.

"No," she said. "My mother was Hungarian; but this house and Vienna are nearly all I know of Europe. I have never seen anything. Please don't let me disturb you."

This annoyed him also—the constant tone of apology. He

remained with her dutifully till they had come to the last picture; and then with a feeling of relief he escaped to his own bedroom.

"What a difference," he repeated, "between a woman like that and the Countess! The Countess is fifty if she is a day, and never at her best would have been as pretty as Mrs. Schilizzi. But how much more important in point of merely womanly attractiveness is perfection of bearing than beauty of face or form! The Countess has the power of beauty; the other has merely the fact of it. The great quality which high-breeding gives to a woman is self-confidence without self-consciousness; for it is a confidence based not on the amount she has seen of life, but on the position from which she sees it: and a girl may have it just as much as a woman. Take for instance Lady Evelyn Standish. She is as innocent of any doubt as to the position from which she sees life, as she is innocent of any knowledge of evil. There is therefore a self-possession underlying even her shyness; for she is never afraid of being natural. The essence of high-breeding is to be perfectly natural under the most artificial circumstances."

As he was piecing these thoughts together, he looked out on the park, and there he saw the woman whom he had thus been obliquely criticizing. She was with her children under the flickering boughs of the horse-chestnut trees. Her dress was creamy brown, with a hat trimmed to match it; their little frocks were red, making them look like anemones. She was dancing to amuse them, with some graceful subdued movement. The sunlight fell on them all through the young expanding leaves; and the group of figures arrested him by its mere charm as a picture. Then its meaning came to his heart and touched him. Feeling seemed to be glancing there under the green shadow. "There," he said to himself, as he stood watching it, "there, I admit, is a perfect piece of nature. Could that woman be as natural with the world as she is with her children, no doubt I should think her charming. Even as it is," he continued, mentally, "she is quite pretty enough to suggest one satisfactory thought to me: and that is the thought of how completely the time is past when a woman's prettiness could ever really disturb me."

Turning from the window, he took out of a small writing-case the photograph of a young girl, with a well-poised head, and eyes that looked with a sort of composed eagerness. "I,

dear Evelyn," he murmured, "if ever your love is mine, I shall never be disturbed by *you*; and you—God help me—shall never be disturbed by *me*."

Lady Evelyn Standish, however, not being an inmate of the castle, he had no present opportunity of showing how amiable he could be to her; and as to the feelings which were practically uppermost in his mind, many judges would have condemned them, not with severity only, but contempt. But be that as it may, under the circumstances they were not unnatural; and if he had been put on his trial, there was much he might have pleaded in his favour. Unless all pride of lineage is to be considered unworthy or ridiculous, Grenville's pride had been by no means of a ridiculous kind. Like other members, indeed, of fallen and impoverished families, he had perhaps cherished it with a somewhat keener consciousness than many men do, with even greater apparent grounds for it, simply because fortune had left him so little else to cherish. And as a boy the feeling with him, no doubt, had been absurdly disproportionate, though then it had been a form of poetry, quite as much as of pride: but in seeing more of the world he had quietly learnt its lesson. His instinctive social fastidiousness remained with him, but he never obtruded it; common sense and a kind heart together tempered it with happy inconsistencies; whilst still believing himself, in the world of fashionable plutocracy, to be better than many of those who now had that world at their feet, he moderated his expectations and accepted his position philosophically; and without relinquishing his belief, learnt more or less to forget it. But now, just as his worldly prospects were brightening, accident had thrown him into a society where mere lineage was still of value, and where all the prejudices which had been dear to him as a dreaming boy were openly avowed and acted on by wide-awake men and women. And by accident also, without any title to explain this, the purity and nobility of his own lineage had been recognized; and he, whom the wives of speculators and peers of yesterday often forgot to bid to their gorgeous ball-rooms, here met with a welcome of which those exclusive ladies would have had as likely a chance as Dives had of heaven. It is easy to laugh at him for what he felt; but this experience stimulated him like some elixir, and he wrote in his diary—"Lady Ashford was a wise woman. Her phrase was perfectly accurate. It seems to me as if my

life were beginning to rise on wings." He wrote this under the impulse of something beyond mere gratified vanity. He felt his ambition becoming stronger and more virile ; his boy's confidence came back to him that some great position was his right ; he felt that he would dignify it as well as be dignified by it. He thought of the *Almanach de Gotha*, and the families, not royal, which were included in it. Visions filled his mind of his own hereditary home ; and it seemed to him that but two things were wanting—the fame he was going to win, and the future which his grandfather had lost—to place him on an equality with the proudest subjects of Europe. This may have been foolish dreaming, but it was not dreaming that was idle. It braced his practical resolution, and fevered him with a sanguine worldliness.

But though this mental condition had the results mentioned, making him annoyed with his hostess, and mentally supercilious as to her niece, it never made him forget that his duty was to please them. All that it took from him was his spontaneous wish to do so. He was constrained in their presence ; his conversation was forced ; and though he did not avoid their company, he did not seek it. But his sense of what he owed them was so strong, that he did what he could to pay his debt to them indirectly, and this in a way which had all the grace of being natural. He constantly devoted himself to the children. He took them for walks ; he told them stories ; he played with them. Both the Princess and Mrs. Schilizzi were delighted ; they were even touched : and he more than made up, in their eyes, for any want of attention to themselves. One of the children indeed, called Irma, after her mother, had an attraction for him of a very peculiar kind. Happy and laughing as she was, when playing with a talking doll, or with a long dachs-hound who haunted the courtyard, her expression had in repose a curious suggestion of sadness, as if the regrets and sorrows of her far-off womanhood made in her child's face a prophetic and wistful mirage. The thought of this child was constantly coming back to him ; and one afternoon in one of his lonely rambles he caught himself saying aloud the following few words, which, as they touched his ears, startled him by an unintended sound in them like verse—

" Irma, I see the stainless cheek
Where life shall write a stain."

Verse-making about a child will perhaps seem to some people an occupation little to be expected from a man pre-occupied with ambition, and elated as Grenville had been by a compliment paid to his pedigree. But the elation just described, which he felt upon that score, did not remain long in its first stage of effervescence. The satisfaction which had at first excited him, before long calmed him. His future seemed assured; doubts about it ceased to trouble him; and his mind having thus made triumphant peace with the world, thoughts and feelings began to again invade him, which half pained and half excited him with troubles of another kind. Assuming, as for the time he did, that his practical career would be successful, he began to ask himself, what was the value of success? The speculative riddles of existence once again confronted him with all their old importunity, and their old poignant import. Having felt at last that for him life had something solid and satisfying, he sought to recover his sobriety in this fit of unwonted intoxication, by telling himself that life and its best prizes were hollow; and the hollowness he imputed to them gave them a ring of music. He seemed to be saying of the world, not "a poor thing, but my own"; but "my own, and therefore a poor thing." He could afford to take this view, as a man securely rich can afford to despise riches; or as a man protected by a parapet can look down into gulfs under him.

In this condition, his coming solitary excursion became every hour more and more pleasurable to anticipate. For a few days he was obliged to postpone it, in order that before he started some letters he was expecting might reach him; but as soon as these arrived, he at once made his arrangements. The evening before his departure found him in such excellent spirits that the Princess thought she had never known him so agreeable, nor had Mrs. Schilizzi ever felt so much at ease with him.

When he was alone in his bedroom, he confided his happiness to his diary. "In my prospects," he wrote, "I have only one thing to complain of; and everything has some drawback. Count T——, to whom an introduction has been given me, and with whom I might have stayed, is away. I shall have therefore to put up in a village or small town called Lichtenbourg. I gather that there is a mineral spring in the place, frequented by a few local invalids; so the inn to which I

must go, and which my servant knows, will be something more than a tavern. It calls itself the Hôtel Imperial, which sounds sufficiently grand; but I know what these obscure hotels are, and no doubt it will be most uncomfortable. It is also nine miles from the nearest railway station; so I shall have to jolt to it in some battered vehicle of the country."

Then he closed his book; and his mind, with an odd rapidity, strayed away to the face of the child Irma. The impression it had produced on him renewed itself and sank deeper into his consciousness, associating itself with many other thoughts—thoughts which filled his mind like the scents of a garden at night. Some of them began to clothe themselves in fragments of rhythmical expression. He opened the window, and looked out on the moonlit park. Its mounds of shadow were hushed in the warm darkness, and the scents of an actual garden rose from the flower-beds below. With greater and greater rapidity his thoughts marshalled themselves into rhythm, and the rhymes sounded like sheep-bells, which the thoughts made naturally by their movement. He returned to his writing-table, and before he betook himself to his bed, some sheets of paper were covered with the following lines—

Oh, dainty figure, floating hair,
Oh, small face, turn and let me see!
Turn, Irma, turn! A child like you
Has always charm for me.

Oh, sad as death, and soft as love,
What's this that I in you behold?
All life seems gazing from the eyes—
The eyes of eight years old.

All life! Why, child, what's life to you?
Your dog, your doll—a toy, a pet—
These are its joys:—and for its griefs,
They match its joys. And yet—

Between your eyelids swims the look
That says "my faith in prayer is o'er."
Your mouth seems quivering to the lost
"Kiss me that kiss once more!"

Is this a fancy, do you think?
Merely an idle fancy? Nay,
Your face but says before its time
What soon your heart will say.

That look was moulded in the past,
Before your father's days began ;
And means what life will mean for you,
And long has meant for man.

Those young clear eyes, before they fade,
Shall scan their past, and read "in vain."
Irma, I see the stainless cheek
Where life shall write a stain.

But oh, I see the fire which first
Shall cast its soft disguise divine
O'er earth and heaven, and envy those
For whom your eyes will shine—

Whose pulses shall be stirred by yours,
And who, on the wet sands of youth,
Shall found that house of faiths and hopes
Which poets dream is truth.

Oh, happy dream, and happy they
Who dream it one by one with you !
Ah ! by their aid might I once more
Dream and believe it true ;

Before once more I wake, as you
And all one day shall wake to feel
Their fair dreams broken one by one
On time's relentless wheel.

For love builds up, and life destroys :
But well—however this may be,
My child, ere love shall live for you,
He will be dead for me.

CHAPTER VIII.

THOUGH Grenville's imaginative mood had by no means next day deserted him, it had lost for the time, at all events, all admixture of sadness. So far as the railway was concerned, his journey was not formidable. The station at which he was to alight was but forty miles away ; and the train, being an Hungarian express, took but three hours in reaching it. The weather was now as hot as an English midsummer. Flowers dotted the plains like sparks dropped from a rocket, and there

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was a sigh, a stir, and a life in the sunlit air as if the lips of the present were expecting those of the future. The groups of peasants and farmers at the intermediate stations seemed to Grenville like happy scenes out of an opera ; and some of the simple vehicles which he saw waiting outside did not augur ill for his coming nine miles' drive. At his own station, however, a great surprise awaited him. When Fritz escorted him out through the small booking-office, instead of having to look for some varnished cart on springs, he saw before him not only two smart omnibuses, with the name of Lichtenbourg blazoned in gold letters on them, but a collection of landaus far better appointed than most that are to be had on hire at places like Nice or Brighton. A moment later his servant had engaged one of them, and he was presently driving off with a rapid but easy motion.

These little touches of modern fashionable civilization gave to his dreamy mood a flavour of mundane piquancy, increasing by contrast the charm of the country he now was entering. It was totally different from that which surrounded the castle of the Princess. First came a mile or so of rich emerald meadows, dotted with quiet cattle ; and an old quadrangular manor-house, with a tower at each corner, was standing and drowsing knee-deep in the grass. Grenville saw over a hedge its quaint gardens and greenhouses. Then came a line of hills covered with pine and beech ; and the road was presently deep in a sylvan valley. The scenery now grew by turns wilder and still more smiling. Wooded gorges alternated with pasture and peeping villages, and village greens each of which had its crucifix, with *prie-dieus* and seats before it, for open-air devotion. Crucifixes were also curiously frequent along the roads ; and nailed to trees from which they could watch the travellers, pictures of saints looked through the leaves like birds. By and by came a region of blossoming orchards ; then a gorge with a torrent brawling at the bottom ; and up in the sky, rising above the foliage, a high-roofed castle, whose tower had a copper dome like a soap-bubble. "That is Count T——'s," said Fritz from his seat by the coachman ; and Grenville knew he was nearing his destination. He passed a watermill ; then came a cottage with an arbour ; and on the cottage was painted the words "Wilhelms-Quelle." Similar cottages, with the names of other springs on them, succeeded each other at intervals of about a furlong ; and judging of his

future from the aspect of these primitive establishments, he began to augur for himself but scant luxury for the night. Presently, however, on the side of a swelling hill, he saw extended the line of a long white building, on which, as he approached it, were legible the words "Hôtel de Milan." He saw, as he passed, a great glazed restaurant, with waiters and white tables; and beyond was a garden with pavilions in it.

"Our hotel, *excellenz*," said Fritz, turning round to him, "is in the town. It is much better than this one. This house, sir, this villa in front of us, is the villa of the King of Moldavia."

"Upon my word," thought Grenville, "I never expected this!"

On either side of him now were alleys of horse-chestnuts, clipped as carefully as a box hedge in a garden, and symmetrical as wooden toys. The road, or the street as one might call it, dipped over the brow of a hill, and a colony of other villas, with verandahs and gaily-painted shutters, on various acclivities, rose out of clouds of leafage. Presently there came a little row of pigmy shops; and opposite these, before the portico of a large white building, the carriage drew up. This was the Hôtel Impérial. Inside there was a ghostly hush everywhere; but the establishment seemed as well-appointed as if it had been at Baden-Baden, in the old days of the gambling. It was now nearly seven o'clock; and whilst Grenville was making his toilet, Fritz ordered dinner for him, and then came to guide him to the restaurant. Here was a new surprise. The restaurant, which adjoined the hotel, but was not actually part of it, formed one side of a garden, of which the hotel formed another; and the tables were arranged, some in a long saloon which was painted with blue skies and flowers, some in a verandah which had the garden and real flowers under it. In the middle of the garden was a kiosque ready for a band; and on the two other sides of the square were ball-rooms, reading-rooms, and a theatre. The whole place had an air of Baden-Baden in miniature.

But it was a Baden-Baden that was for the present sleeping. The important Frenchman who superintended the restaurant informed Grenville that the season was only just begun—indeed that that day was reckoned the first day of it; and he handed his excellency the opening number of the Visitors' List

—a little flimsy sheet with not more than fifty names in it. Lamps were sparkling in the kiosque; dainty tables were laid; Grenville's dinner was really of the most delicate kind; but besides his own, only two tables were occupied; in the garden below was only a loitering group or two; and such voices, and the movement of such feet as there were, were oddly audible in the prevalent dream-like silence.

After dinner he rambled through the little town, with its hilly roadways dim under their mysterious foliage. The fantastic villas gleamed. There was gilding on the gates of some of them—coronets and twisted cyphers. The whole place was kept with a faultless and fastidious neatness, which was doubly piquant from a strange suggestion of primitiveness. There was no gas, but the clipt horse-chestnut alleys were lit with lamps that shone like midsummer glow-worms. There were seats in green recesses, and wandering paths amongst verdure. Everything—even the gravel raked so carefully—the gravel stirred now by hardly a foot but Grenville's—teemed with suggestions of unknown dainty life. The air flowed warm under the leaves like a human sigh, carrying with it breaths of jasmine. It seemed to be waiting for something that would soon come to it—for floating sounds of bands, for whispers, for women's dresses. It seemed to be waiting for life, like a woman waiting for love. It seemed to be saying, "Here is my heart—fill it!"

This subtle impression sunk deep into Grenville's mind, and when he awoke next morning, it was there like a bunch of violets. He was to start early on one of his expeditions, and by half-past eight Fritz had a carriage ready for him. Away he drove into the fresh youth of the day, past open Venetian shutters, and bedding hung over window-sills. His road for some way was that he had traversed yesterday. The apple-blossoms and the gorges again met his eyes. But in his heart and his nerves there was now a new restlessness. All life seemed to be imploring for something; and his own life added its vague but passionate petition. Filmy memories of love-affairs long past began to come down to him in the resinous breaths of the forest, where the dew was still on the leaves of the wild strawberries; and with them fugitive senses of some yet uncaptured happiness. Even a peasant kneeling at the shrine of a wayside saint thrilled his nerves with some undefined expectancy.

It was a day of dreams. The castle—the object of his expedition—was something beyond his wildest hopes. Like the one he had seen already, it covered an isolated rock; only large as that one was, this was three times its size, and was almost ghastly in the completeness of its preservation, like a corpse that is undecayed. The gate-towers, the guard-rooms, the batteries, the long battlemented walls, the fields and gardens enclosed in their vast cincture, the quaint pavilions looking like miniature forts, and lastly the dwelling itself, hugging the edge of a precipice, and reached by three draw-bridges—a pile with a hundred windows, crooked arcaded courts, rooms stacked with armour, halls with painted ceilings, where tattered tapestry still hung, and worm-eaten dim chairs still glimmered with gilding—all this, though deserted excepting for one custodian, had hardly a stone or a tile on a roof missing. This overpowering shell of the past, with its strange enchanted silence, struck a note in his heart like musical strings vibrating—a wail after that elusive world in which alone the heart can be satisfied. It seemed, to Grenville, to be echoing with what was gone, just as Lichtenbourg with its lamps seemed to be waiting for what was coming.

Of these two impressions, the last became even more vivid that evening. He found when he dined that there were several parties in the restaurant; and afterwards the band in the kiosk gave its first performance for the season. There were some listeners under the trees, and a faint whisper of feet; and now and then through the shadow moved the gleam of some rustling toilette. Early next morning he found his way to the springs—very different from the antiquated cottages by the road. They were near together, all of them in a winding garden, which filled with its walks and grass the bottom of a wooded valley. Again the band was playing; some visitors were drinking the waters. Gay parasols made bright patches of colour; and, here and there, brilliant from banks of leafage, there shone forth masses of blossoming lilac. Grenville wandered about scanning the people curiously. He was interested to notice in certain of them an air of suppressed fashion: and although presumably they had come most of them for their health, yet they and the scene together were somehow suggestive of dissipation. He had intended that day to have gone on his second expedition; but the life about him

stirred his fancy so pleasantly, that he determined instead to remain quiet and observe it.

But in an hour the gardens were empty ; the town looked lifeless, as if all its inhabitants were hibernating ; and he presently fell a prey to a blank reaction. The silence and solitude gradually lay like a weight on him. He regretted that he had not got his expedition over ; and he longed to be back with the Princess, hearing her crisp voice again.

Nor were his spirits raised when he learnt towards the evening that this waste of one day had necessitated the waste of another. The castle he was to see was inhabited ; to-morrow it would be closed to visitors, so he would have to wait on and go there the day after. He got his information from the clerk in the bureau of his hotel ; but the first dejection it caused him received some sudden relief. He was just moving away when a series of German exclamations reached his ear, as if intended for it, and were followed by his own name. He turned round, and before him was the doctor—his companion in the train—who informed him that Lichtenbourg was the scene of his new practice, and that he had just been visiting professionally one of the children of the hotel manager.

To Grenville the sight of an acquaintance was like a fire on a winter's day. He induced the doctor to have some coffee with him in the garden. He asked him many questions both about the place and himself, and presently told him his own reasons for being there. The doctor, though a new-comer, had much local knowledge already, and had plenty to tell him about the object of his postponed expedition. It was a castle till lately the property of an old but decayed family, who had sold it under pressure of necessity to a marvellous Polish Count. This personage, whose family also was impoverished, had by some means or other made a large fortune in Egypt, where for years he had been essential to the Khedive, and had acquired the dignity of a Pasha. The doctor himself had never visited the castle ; but wonderful tales were current of the splendours to be seen in the interior. "And," added the doctor, smiling, "it lies beyond wild forests, which the peasants still believe to be filled by gnomes and goblins." Grenville was delighted with this picturesque intelligence ; but the doctor did not seem to share such pleasure as he had given. Grenville noticed in him a sadness which civility

could hardly mask, and asked with kindly interest after his health and his professional prospects.

"By and by," said the doctor, "if nothing intervenes to prevent it, my practice ought to be considerable, since this place will be filled by consumptive patients. We doctors, you see, are an example of the life that is generated by decay. But, as I told you, when I had the honour of travelling with you, I was not born to be fortunate. However," he added, "I am no longer a cripple—at all events not physically ; and now, if you will excuse me, I must use my strength to leave you."

Grenville asked him to dine either that night or the next, but the doctor declined. "I fear," he said, "there are many reasons which make my acceptance of your gracious invitation impossible."

There was obviously something so much amiss with him, that Grenville that night, meeting the manager in the hall, spoke to him of the doctor, and praising him in the highest terms, observed at the same time that he seemed to be out of spirits. The manager was much impressed by the praises of the English "excellency," and at once began lamenting, as well as explaining, the troubles from which the doctor was suffering. It appeared they were financial. The poor man, after his losses, had borrowed money of the Jews, one of whom, growing impatient, had chosen the present moment as a favourable opportunity for pressing him with the extremest measures of the law. The manager remarked with much philosophic commiseration on the pity it was that a savant so gifted as the doctor should be so seriously hampered at a critical point in his career by the want of a sum which was less than two hundred pounds. Grenville agreed that it was so, and his blank prospects for to-morrow became doubly depressing to him after what he had just heard. Nor when the morning came did things wear a brighter aspect. For an hour or so the scene at the wells amused him. But then again came dullness. In depression he started for a walk into the country. On returning to his hotel he thought half the day had been killed ; but he found on consulting his watch that it was but half-past eleven. The gardens were empty except for two nurse-maids. The theatre and conversation rooms looked as if they would never again be open. The whole place, which but two days ago was so new and delightfully suggestive, began to oppress

him with a sort of hateful familiarity. Suddenly, as he was sitting on a bench, begging the hours to move quicker, a thought occurred to him, of which the immediate result was that he extracted an old letter from his pocket, and began on its blank side to scribble a series of calculations. "I think," he muttered presently, "I could manage to spare sufficient." And entering the hotel, he at once asked for the manager. "I am concerned," he said to him, "at hearing of the distress of our friend the doctor; and if it is true that the sum which you mentioned would relieve him, I will ask this favour of you. Let me—and I will do so now—pay that sum to yourself; and you, without mentioning me, advance the same to the doctor. Tell him that his personal security is in your eyes quite sufficient, and make the terms as easy as he could consent to without humiliation." The manager's respect for Grenville, great as it was before, became now even greater; and he was willing to do whatever his excellency should suggest. He was besides a man of good disposition. He admired generosity, refraining from it solely on account of its expense; but now that in this case such drawback had been removed, he willingly engaged that everything should be settled before night.

Grenville after this was in a rather better humour; but still the hours dragged wearily, and the afternoon seemed endless. At last, however, the aspect of things brightened. The dinner-hour drew near. He was not hungry; but to eat would at all events be an occupation. In a somewhat happier mood he was strolling in front of the restaurant, looking occasionally at the waiters as they bustled and arranged the tables. The warm daylight was dying in a dim flush, and here and there within-doors lamps were being lighted. Nothing was wanting to the scene but the life that it seemed to call for. Suddenly, on turning round, he saw moving amongst the trees the graceful figure of a woman, which at once startled him into interest. Her pale-pink dress and black hat, with feathers in it, spoke of the most refined fashion of Mayfair or of Paris; and there was something in her air and movements, though he could only see her back, which filled him at once with a pleasant sense of curiosity. He took a turn round the kiosk, so as to meet her and see her face. The manœuvre was successful. He encountered her. He started—it was Mrs. Schilizzi!

"Who in the world," he exclaimed, "would have thought to see you here?" He smiled as he spoke, and his manner was

more cordial and friendly than it ever had been whilst they were staying together at the castle. She, on the contrary, looked at him a little coldly, and remained at a distance from him, as if wishing to move on.

"I'm so sorry we troubled you," she said. "It was my aunt who insisted on it. Myself I knew quite well that you were too busy to attend to such matters."

"What on earth do you mean?" exclaimed Grenville, with an artless accent of bewilderment, which the most suspicious of listeners could not have doubted was genuine.

Mrs. Schilizzi did not doubt it certainly. The slight cloud on her face melted with a naïve quickness. "What!" she exclaimed with a smile. "Didn't you get our telegram?"

"Never," he said. "What telegram?"

"Why," she replied, "just after you left, I heard from my doctor about the place I thought of going to. He said there was scarlatina there; so that put it out of the question; and he strongly recommended that I should bring my children here. My aunt telegraphed at once to you, in my name, begging you to engage some rooms for us; but getting no answer, I came over myself. I thought, too, that before deciding, I might as well see how I liked the look of things."

At this moment Fritz appeared from the hotel, and as soon as he caught sight of Grenville, hurried up to him with an envelope.

"I shouldn't wonder," said Grenville, "if this were your telegram at last. It is! Well, the mystery explains itself. My name was written *Glanvil*, and the address was 'Hôtel de Milan.'"

"Ah," said Mrs. Schilizzi, "that was the agent's fault. He put the address. He thought he knew all about it. This, I find, is the right hotel. I shall settle about our rooms to-morrow, and go back in the afternoon, and at once make my arrangements."

"It's a pity," said Grenville, civilly, "that you can't wait a day. In that case we might have gone back together. I propose to-morrow to see one of those old castles."

"How interesting!" she exclaimed, with such an air of sincerity that Grenville doubted for a moment whether he would not ask her to come with him. The idea, however, was interrupted by Fritz, who announced that his dinner was ready; and as Mrs. Schilizzi had ordered hers in her sitting-room, he

took himself off, expressing a hope at parting that he might meet her an hour or so later, when the band began its performance. She nodded a pleased assent, and by and by, in the lamplight, he returned to the same spot, and waited for her under the leafy shadows.

"God bless my soul, we have smartness here with a vengeance!" he said to himself presently, as a figure in a long pale cloak, that was braided with gold and trimmed with swan's-down, came down the steps of the hotel accompanied by a maid who was peering about inquiringly.

He at once advanced, and with an air of happy relief, Mrs. Schilizzi said, "I shouldn't have known where to look for you. One man in the dusk is so much like another."

"You," said Grenville, "at all events, can't say that about women."

She glanced at him timidly, as they seated themselves in view of the kiosque. "Do you mean," she asked, "that my cloak is too smart for this place?"

"Not at all," said Grenville. As he said it he was hardly sincere; but a moment later he felt that he had become so, when he glanced at her face above the swan's-down that seemed like a little flower—a flower childishly conscious of the prettiness of its own petals. It was not a face that excited in him any great interest, but the element of childishness which he now began to discover in her had, in spite of its freshness, a certain something of pathos, and made him feel kindly towards her, as he might have done towards a child. He began to describe to her the wonders of the castle he had visited. She listened intently, taking in every word, and he finally did the thing he had already contemplated. He invited her to come with him to the other castle to-morrow.

"Could I?" she exclaimed. "I wonder if I could manage to wait?" The pleasure of the prospect for her was doubled by the complete surprise. She played with her doubts for a few moments, and then assented, with a soft laugh of delight.

When they parted, which they did before very long, he took another solitary stroll, in the lamp-lit horse-chestnut alleys; and in a mood of lazy conjecture he began to think her over. In the course of the conversation they had spoken a little about their visit to the Princess's; and one or two things that Mrs. Schilizzi had said had considerably raised his opinion of her. He had made some passing allusion to Countess

C——; and Mrs. Schilizzi, with a discrimination and also with a decision that struck him, had remarked on the charm of her appearance, and the still greater charm of her manner, adding, "Not that she cares to be nice to me; but she's so self-possessed and natural, there's an artistic pleasure in watching her." "Your aunt's artistic sense," he had answered, "is not quite so developed." Into Mrs. Schilizzi's face had come an expression of humour, as if a piece of gravel had rippled a quiet pool; and she had said, "Of course my aunt imagines that the Countess snubs her." The words were commonplace enough; but her tone and expression in saying them seemed to Grenville, as he called her image back to him, to show the keenest and yet gentlest understanding of the whole facts in question. And yet that this should be so was a puzzle as well as a surprise to him. He tried to figure to himself Mrs. Schilizzi in London: and the only place at home into which he could possibly fit her, was not one that seemed consistent with much social discrimination. He thought of the pretty faces, and dresses just as pretty, that on any June morning might be seen thronging the Row. He thought of how many of those faces had no name or meaning, in the only world which he or his friends knew. And then he thought of others, whose names were perhaps known to him, and who at least suggested a definite social type. But it was a type that to him was more distasteful than any. It was that of the women who are fashionable in everything except in fact—the adored of youthful Guardsmen—the heroines of water-parties and of Hurlingham; and in his own mind he classed Mrs. Schilizzi as one of these. He pictured her drawing-room, scented and over-ornamented, with men much at their ease in it, lounging in deep arm-chairs or on sofas, and playing impertinently with her knick-knacks, whilst she lounged also, resenting nothing that was said to her. This did not make him forgetful of what he now thought were her merits; nor did it make him look on her less good-naturedly; but it did prevent his feeling the contentment he might have felt, in the prospect of having to-morrow so pretty and appreciative a companion.

CHAPTER IX.

By a quarter to ten the following morning a smart-looking victoria stood at the hotel door; and Grenville was smoking a cigarette with the air of a man waiting. The carriage in fact had been there for something like twenty minutes, and his face had begun to wear a slight shade of annoyance, though it was the annoyance of resignation rather than that of impatience. At last a voice was heard within on the staircase—the voice of a lady calling out to her maid. “Julie,” it was saying, “this is really too bad of you. You first give me my wrong dress, and now these gloves are both for my left hand. Take them away, and bring me some others instantly.” There was a certain note of temper in all this which for the moment slightly jarred upon Grenville. The impression however was instantly done away with, when the same voice was heard, with completely restored good-humour and also with a softness in it, full of a quick repentance, saying, “Oh, Julie, thank you—these are just what I wanted.” A pale brown dress, the colour of which Grenville recognized, gleamed through the shadow of the hall, and Mrs. Schilizzi issued.

Her lips, and her eyes also, were full of apologies for her lateness; and the flush in her cheeks showed the sincerity of her emotion. “*I am* so sorry,” she repeated as soon as they were settled in the carriage. “Waiting is a thing I never could bear myself.” She turned her eyes, and the brown feathers of her hat, to him, her chin hiding itself in the sable about her collar—turned them, with an air that might have seemed to be asking for admiration, if it had not with such naïve frankness asked for pardon instead. Grenville’s pleasant answer disarmed her timidity. “My maid,” she went on, “was so stupid. She gave me the wrong dress. I only saw it was the wrong one when it was on; and then I had to change it. This suits me to-day so much better than the other.”

“What,” said Grenville, “do your frocks change their colours, like a chameleon?”

“No,” she replied. “But I change; and this is the colour that suits me best when I am happy.” Here she broke into

a little musical laugh, which died in her eyes into a look of returning timidity, as she added, "Mr. Grenville, you will think I am very silly?"

Grenville thought she was, but was too civil to say so; and yet at the same time he had some undefined impression that the silliness, such as it was, was a thing on the surface only; and he felt as they drove off, amongst the villas and the horse-chestnuts, a pleasure in the sense of sharing with her the soft air of the morning, and all the day's prospects which it seemed to breathe in their faces. This impression deepened as from time to time he glanced at her, and he saw how fresh was the pleasure that she herself was experiencing. He had thought that her face was like a flower yesterday evening. It was now like a flower with the dew on it, tremulous with life and brightness. At first however he was annoyed by the frequency of the exclamations with which she called attention to this thing or that thing—the shining roof of a villa, a hedge, or even a column of smoke; but he gradually realized that, common as these objects were, there was something distinctive in the aspect of each as she noticed it—some effect of light, some tender contrast of colour, which when it was pointed out to him he at once appreciated, but which, had he been by himself, would have altogether escaped him.

"Oh," she exclaimed at last, drawing a long breath, "look at that! Look! Do let us stop the carriage."

The carriage was stopped; and then, with an amused perplexity, he turned round to her, asking her: "Well, what is it?"

She pointed to an orchard of cherry-blossom. He had himself already remarked it—a feature in the landscape, a part of its passing pageant. But to her it had a beauty in itself, peculiar to that moment. "Do you see the petals?" she said. "They are palpitating like the wings of butterflies."

There was in her voice an almost religious tone, like that of a child repeating a hymn with feeling. She saw he understood her, and gave him a glance of gratitude; and then her gravity, like a small wave on the sand, sparkled and broke into a laugh of unconscious happiness.

Grenville watched her curiously. Happiness, so it seemed to him, was buoying her up into self-confidence, and her real self was opening, just like the petals of the cherry-

blossoms. He began to feel an impulse to confide his thoughts seriously to her.

"I," he said, as the carriage moved on again, "enjoy nature in some ways perhaps as much as most people; but I never saw any one so sensitive to its beauty as you. I have already learned much from you. The spring is showing me beauties I never saw in it before."

She turned to him blushing crimson, with an expression of startled pain.

"How can you say so?" she faltered. "You are laughing at me. I could not teach anything to anybody—to you least of all people."

"Indeed," said Grenville, kindly, "you do me a great wrong. I was not laughing. I meant what I said, literally."

"Of course," she went on, only partially reassured, "you understand nature—a great poet like you. You can describe it—you can express its meaning. I can only feel it, and I am foolish to show my feelings. But a minute ago I was so happy that I forgot myself."

"It is you," said Grenville, "who are laughing at me now. Me a great poet! I published one small volume, which only my friends read; and they have now forgotten it. It was a piece of myself, perhaps; but it was not a piece of literature."

"Yes," she said, "that was its great charm. Most books are books. Your book was a person. I was not one of your friends; but I read it, and have never forgotten it. I bought a copy; and what do you think mother did? She told me I was so extravagant. All you said about nature—I remember still how it moved me, more even than Keats did. What you said about other things, I didn't understand—then."

Grenville now began to notice in her a characteristic which interested him. Her mood changed like an English sky in April. At one moment she would be hidden behind some cloud of shyness; and then again she would brighten, and show, with her unconscious confidence, herself and her slightest thoughts as the sky shows its blueness.

"I'll tell you," he said, "what I think about your appreciation of nature. You realize how beautiful it is in itself. What I attend to most is, the human thoughts it stirs in me. Look about you at the valley we now are entering. Look at these wayside crosses! And there—nailed against that pine-tree,

do you see the picture of St. Joseph—so uncouth and so simple? And those peasants too in the wood, tugging at their unfortunate cart-horse—to me they seem the serfs of some phantom baron. The whole place is full of the air of the Middle Ages, and all my imagination is troubled by the smell of the pine-trees.”

She looked about her, taking in every detail, a new excitement changing her whole expression. “Ah?” she exclaimed, “you are right. This is just like a fairy-tale. See that little gray building; it must, I am sure, be a hermitage. And where does the baron live? And do you think there are robbers? Nothing seems real except you, and the carriage, and my frock. Do go on; I want you to tell me more.”

“Well,” he replied, entering readily into her mood, “the farther we drive the deeper we are getting into fairy-land, and the place we shall reach at last is a genuine fairy castle. It is not a ruin; it is lived in; it is full of all sorts of splendours, that are hidden away under its moss-grown roofs and pinnacles. It belongs to a mysterious Count, who spent all his youth in the East, and returned to Europe laden with gold and jewels. As to this I am serious: I am not romancing. A man at Litchenbourg told me his whole history. He is a Polish Count, and also an Egyptian Pasha. The castle is very old. There is a picture of it in the book I showed you; but what it is like now I know no better than you.”

She leaned back silently, smiling at her own thoughts: then suddenly she looked up at him, and said, laughing into his eyes, “And tell me—do tell me—will there be ghosts, and drawbridges—and a chapel, and dungeons, and winding stairs and balconies? You who have seen so much can hardly tell how excited I am!”

She was so completely natural, and there was in her spirits something not only so buoyant but at the same time so confiding, that Grenville was charmed by it into a curious sense of intimacy with her. He felt that they were play-fellows sharing the same holiday.

“Do,” she went on presently, “do promise me that there will be balconies, with rusty iron scroll-work, beautifully wrought. I am sure there will be; and from one of them a Princess used to look into the distance, waiting perhaps for something that never came.” The laugh had died out of her voice as she uttered these last words. They fell from her

lips with a slow meditative softness. "Do you," she said, "understand how my thoughts wander?"

"Yes," he answered, "and mine are wandering with them."

He hardly knew what he was saying, but his voice came like truth to her. For a time they hardly spoke. They had left the more beaten road, and were ascending a rugged track, which climbed up a wooded hill-side, and from which nothing but wood was visible. The smells of bark and of leaves became pungent about them. Some wild-eyed charcoal-burners scrambled down a bank, with baskets on their bowed backs, and stared after the carriage. Presently came the cottage of a forester, with some wolves' heads nailed against it. These Grenville pointed out to his companion, who laid her hand on his arm, with an impulse of imaginative terror. Then he said—

"I wonder if I dare tell you something more?"

"Yes," she whispered; "what?"

"All these valleys are haunted by gnomes and spirits. The peasants say so, and surely they ought to know. Ah! you shiver. But you needn't. They don't come out in daylight. Well," he added, "and what do you think now? Does not the mystery of the forest seem to be closing round us?"

For an hour the journey continued to be of this character.

At last, however, after a number of ups and downs, they emerged on some high grass-land, with a timbered farm-house belonging to it, which bore the date of 1490, and on one of whose gable-ends was a quaint Madonna fading. A little further on came hedges that showed signs of clipping. A shed stood by the road, with some carts and ploughs under its shelter; and a moment later, without any warning, the carriage had stopped before the gateway of a discoloured turreted pile, the extent and the situation of which was made doubtful by the trees surrounding it. A porter unbarred the doors, and bowing obsequiously to the visitors, admitted them to a court, narrow but of great length, entirely surrounded by buildings, and having flower-beds and lilac-bushes in the middle. Their career of sight-seeing was apparently all marked out for them. They were taken up a flight of fantastic steps, which brought them to an open arcade, running all the length of the court; and down this they were led to a cluster of towers at the end of it. A series of

loopholes pierced in the outer wall showed them as they passed that the castle was on the shoulder of a hill, and gardens and tree-tops were visible far below them. A small door opened, and the exhibition began. Outside the walls were pallid with rude plaster; within, the visitors found themselves treading on an Italian pavement; they were startled by a glitter of profuse and barbarous gilding, by purple portières, and fanciful Moorish looking-glasses. These decorations belonged to a sort of vestibule: and out of this, by various crooked passages, and through more portières, they passed to a nest of bedrooms. The situation of all of them was romantic and picturesque in the extreme. They occupied strange towers and angles of the ancient building, and looked down over the green depths below; but their furniture and their decorations were of the strangest kind imaginable. The beds, fantastic in shape, were draped with cloth of gold, the dressing-tables were garnished with pictures of Oriental dancing-girls, the ormolu frames of which glittered with enamel and turquoise; silver stars and crescents studded the ceilings, and crimson rugs glowed on the polished floors. Presently they found themselves in the Count's private apartments. His bed had legs of ivory. The quilt was almost covered by an embroidered coronet; a painted coronet covered the bottom of his bath; above his wash-hand stand were twenty bottles of essences; and his jug and basin—both enormous—were of silver. Then, by means of many tortuous staircases, they reached what originally had been the banqueting-hall of the castle. It was long and low, with a roof of ponderous vaulting, but the Count had seen fit to relieve this with florid gilding. There was a mosaic pavement, as slippery and as shining as ice, and the furniture looked like the stock of a bric-à-brac dealer in Florence. From this they passed into a long suite of rooms—a billiard-room, hung with jewelled Oriental weapons, a drawing-room, where everything—even the legs of the tables—was ultramarine, a great saloon surrounded by Gobelins tapestry, a dining-room, an antechamber, and last of all a chapel, where the walls were dim with monumental tablets, and kneeling knights carved in discoloured marble, and where a golden lamp in the silence was burning before the altar.

This apparently ended the general routine of sight-seeing, but Fritz, industrious as ever on behalf of his master's dignity,

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had meanwhile been impressing the greatness of it on a fat, supercilious-looking seneschal; and the visitors were accordingly informed that if they would like to use it for their luncheon, there was a room with a fine view, which would be very much at their service. The offer was accepted. The room was in one of the towers, and, owing to some lucky circumstance, it had escaped scot-free from the irrepressible taste of the Count. The walls were whitewashed, the floor bare; the cabinets, chairs, and tables were of dark worm-eaten walnut; and in a corner was an old spinet.

"Here," exclaimed Grenville, "is the castle in its natural state. The ghosts of the past I am sure must make this their refuge." He went to the window, which he opened. "Mrs. Schilizzi," he said, "come here, let me beg of you, and see your dream realized." She went towards him, and they stepped out on a balcony—a balcony whose railings were of beautiful old wrought iron. To right and left of them were irregular bulging towers, and steep tiled roofs spiked with fantastic ornaments. Below them a wood of beech trees descended the precipitous hill-side, and from the bottom of this an expanse of country spread itself, reaching away to hills on the far horizon. Mrs. Schilizzi said nothing, but leaned on the rusty iron, and seemed lost in the prospect. He watched her dainty figure against the background of weather-beaten wall. Her look and attitude were grave and more absorbed than he had ever seen them hitherto, and though her expression was not what would be necessarily called religious, she made him think of St. Monica and the balcony of the house at Ostia. "I suppose," he said at last, "you are fulfilling your own scripture. You seem to be waiting for the something that never comes."

She turned her eyes to him. They seemed to be full of dreams, as a pool when it ceases to sparkle becomes full of reflections. Then, as if to perplex him, the sparkle came suddenly back again, and she said, "Do you mean that I seem to be waiting for our luncheon?"

"For that," said Grenville, "you need at any rate wait no longer. See! our table is spread. Was anything ever so charming!"

Mrs. Schilizzi, as she moved to take her seat, opened the old spinet and struck a jangling chord on the keys. "There!" she exclaimed, "now I have done with dreaming. Mr.

Grenville, all this is making me quite beside myself. Perhaps I shall be better after I have eaten something."

One of the servants brought in a bowl of lilacs, which he placed on the table, by way of a simple ornament. She gave an exclamation of pleasure at sight of the delicate colour. "A thing like that," she said, "always puts me in spirits."

As they eat their cold provisions they began to talk over the castle, and Grenville enlarged on the extreme interest of it as a building, and the grotesque misfortune that had befallen it through the taste of its present owner.

"You shouldn't," she said, "talk about that. You are spoiling everything. I suppose it's vulgar, if you come to take it to pieces; but here in this forest, I think one's imagination alters it; and it's splendid for the time, if one only believes it's splendid."

"Yes," said Grenville, "I think you are right there. Ridiculous and vulgar as all these splendours are, they are, at the same time, so audacious, so barbarous, and so insolent, that they load one's mind with some odd sense of romance. A place like this would in England be quite impossible."

"I feel," she said, "that I hardly know where I am—where, or in what century. I don't believe that I ever thought much about such things before; but what you used to say to my aunt—you didn't say much to me—somehow seemed to open a new door in my mind."

Grenville, though he felt her attractive, and was now quite at his ease with her, had yet no wish for conversation that was too personal; so he said, "But surely, so far as regards the *where*, you must know this country as well as you know England."

"You under-estimate," she said, "my capacity for knowing little. Haven't I, Mr. Grenville, told you so much already? My aunt's castle—I know the four walls of that. I know my husband's flat in Vienna, the Prater, and the Opera-house. I know nothing besides, but Countess D——'s villa in Hungary."

"Who," asked Grenville, "is Countess D——?"

"My cousin," she said. "Mother was a Hungarian. She was very poor, but of very good family—you must not think me boastful for saying that; only except Alma D—— her relations are all dead; and Alma's villa was new and might have been anywhere; and outside its grounds all that I saw

was fields. As to Vienna," she went on after a pause, "of course a person like myself—the wife of a Greek engineer—is nobody and sees nothing. I am there either a prisoner or a tourist. Considering that, till I married, I lived always with ladies and gentlemen, it is a little odd sometimes to feel myself in that position—not," she added, "that in London, or rather at Hampstead, I am anybody. I am very provincial at the best of times ; or perhaps, if I had only the courage, I ought to call myself by the terrible word suburban."

Just as in some pictures the most delicate colours are in the varnish, so the most delicate shades of some characters reveal themselves less in their words than in their manner and intonation. Mrs. Schilizzi's manner at once struck Grenville and touched him. There was in it not only a certain plaintive prettiness, but a humour and a dignity, when she passed these criticisms on herself, which was, in his judgment, quite enough to refute them.

"I never," he said, "saw any one less provincial than you."

"Well," she replied, "I won't argue the point. If ever you were to see more of me, I should have little need to do so."

When their luncheon was over, and they were once more in the carriage, with a frank abruptness she recurred to the same subject. As they drove away, she turned to look at the castle, and said with a slight sigh, "Perhaps one reason why I feel so *borné* is not that I have seen so few things, but that I long to see many. And yet, after all, inexperience has its advantages. A person who had not seen so little as I have, I am sure could have never enjoyed a day so much."

"You cannot," said Grenville, "have enjoyed it more than I have : though I have enjoyed it for a reason that could never be shared by you."

"What reason?" she asked.

"The reason is," he replied, "that I have had you as a companion."

The moment he had said the words he repented of them. The compliment was obvious, and had slipped from him, out of some forgotten habit ; but the effect it had upon her went into his heart like a knife. She gave him first a look of surprise and pleasure, which shamed him by its trust in his sincerity ; then came what seemed a reaction of doubt, and a

pained resentment. The jolting of the carriage for a time made further speaking impossible. She had turned away from him ; but for many minutes afterwards he saw, as often as he glanced at her, that a deep flush in her cheek kept coming and going as if her heart were in some hidden tumult. A sudden sense came over him of the nature of the life beside him—of how delicate it was, how easily pleased and wounded ; and he said to himself with an almost disproportionate compunction, which was however wholly without vanity, “ Idiot that I am—what little care I take of her—

‘I that would not let e’en the winds of heaven
Visit her face too roughly.’”

By and by, in a totally changed tone, full of sympathy, but without a suspicion of compliment, he took up the conversation as if nothing had interrupted it. “ I can hardly admit,” he said, “ that the pleasure you have taken in our expedition, and which, as I told you just now, has so added to mine, is due to the mere accident of your not having travelled much. Travel more, as no doubt you will some day, and each new climate you visit will affect you like the sound of some new musical instrument, or some new human face thrilling you with new sympathies. I wonder if you will catch my meaning. I could explain it to you by my own experiences. The Scottish Highlands, for instance, purple with autumn air ; the mountains whose slopes in sunlight are creased with rocky shadows, or which lift themselves through the wet mist on each other’s shoulders into the clouds ; the wet clouds that come trooping down over the heather ; the eyes of the moorland children on the bare hill-path at evening—all this—how shall I put it?—it speaks to the nerves of some one secret of existence. This land of castles and forests says something wholly different. It tantalizes the spirit with different dreams of self-fulfilment. And Italy, again, and the Mediterranean sky—the very thought of these dazzles one with a new and coloured universe—where the gardens glitter with statues, where the ceilings are frescoed with all the gods of Olympus, and where blue evenings are seen through bowers of Banksia roses. Did you ever,” he went on, “ read the story of Pyramus, who died at the foot of the mulberry-tree, and whose blood gave its colour to the fruit? All the world’s various

civilizations, in the same way, give some new hue, as we realize them, to all the flowers of the imagination."

He was not looking at her as he spoke, but he instinctively knew that she was attending to him. He was therefore surprised when, at this point, she hastily murmured, "Don't," and turned her head away from him.

"Why?" he said, "what is it? Tell me—have I been boring you?"

She looked him in the face, and her eyes were tremulous with tears. "You only," she said, "give me longings for what I shall never know."

When he spoke again, it was in a more commonplace tone. "You shouldn't," he said, "take so gloomy a view of your future. You should light it up with the happiest expectations you can, and with as many of these as possible. Expectations are like lamps, which cost nothing to keep burning, and events are able only to blow out one at a time."

After this, there was an end of seriousness and sentiment, and their talk became nothing but the ripple of meeting sympathies, till once again they saw the villas of Lichtenbourg, and agreed that they would dine in the restaurant, keeping each other company.

Between their return and dinner she had completed her arrangements about her rooms; and the prettiness of the salon she had secured, and the comfort of the rooms for her children, filled her with spirits and pleasure, as if they were some new toy. She talked about them to Grenville with an innocent and happy volubility, which secured his interest by taking his interest for granted; and then from her rooms she passed on to her children, telling him of their lessons, their health, their tastes, their characters—moving from subject to subject lightly and tenderly as a butterfly. Grenville listened absorbed, wondering why he did so. It was hardly so much words that he was listening to, as a kind of moral music; and when dinner was over he looked back at it with wonder, reflecting that the conversation, which had made it pass so quickly, had hardly strayed beyond the limits of a stranger's nursery.

Again, in the warm evening, they sat under the lamp-lit trees, listening to the cadence of the band. By this time she was silent. Her eyes and her lips were pensive. "Listen," she murmured, as, a gay waltz being ended, the music turned

into something that might have been a love-song or a hymn. Touched by the sound, Grenville said to her softly, "How fond you are of your children! Whether you see much of the world or little, you at all events have them."

"Yes," she said, and her words kept time to the music, as if she trusted it half to hide and half to express her emotion, "they are all I have to live for."

Presently, as if feeling that she had betrayed more than she meant to, she turned to him with a smile that was at once bright and languid, and thanking him for the pleasure he had that day been the means of giving her, said she was tired, and must now be going to rest. "You have been so kind," she added, "I shall always think of you as one of the kindest people I have known."

"And I," he answered, "I shall always think of you——" He paused.

"Yes," she said, "yes. Tell me how will you think of me?" She put the question with an undisguised curiosity; but before he had attempted to answer, she had risen, and with her eyes on the ground, said, "If you think of me at all, I will tell you how to do so. Think of me as some one waiting for something that never comes."

CHAPTER X.

THE following morning they returned together to the Princess's, but no one who had seen them in the train would ever have thought it possible that two people, so shyly and so civilly distant, had only the day before been so suddenly and so happily intimate. The moment they met again she saw he was a changed man; and the change in him instantly produced one that answered to it in her. When they talked during the journey it was merely about the most commonplace matters, and for long periods they were both completely silent, she self-wounded by thoughts of what now seemed to her to have been folly; he, conscious of some cold revulsion of feeling which made the events of yesterday at once a wonder and an annoyance to him. He was not inattentive to her; but

she had retreated from him to an indefinite distance ; and she seemed, when they reached the castle, to retreat further still. He found awaiting him a fresh packet of letters, at a few of which he glanced whilst getting ready for dinner. Thoughts of the world, and of success in it, went through his blood like alcohol, and he muttered on his way to the drawing-room, "What an idiot I was yesterday !"

His condition of mind, however, at dinner, and during the evening, expressed itself merely in an access of mundane good-humour. He troubled himself to make conversation, and he made it with some success. He described Lichtenbourg ; he described the castles he had visited ; he laughed at the Pasha's furniture, at his bath, and his bottles of essences ; and he said to the Princess, "The whole time I was there, I was in my own mind trying to construct a picture of him. I felt sure he had waxed moustaches, hair dyed and curly, and eyes that had fluttered the heart of every ballet-girl in the Cairo opera-house."

The Princess was delighted, and thought he had never been so entertaining before. But as for Mrs. Schilizzi, she listened to him half bewildered, wondering if this could really be her late sympathetic companion. There was nothing in what he said that was actually hard or ill-natured ; but through it all ran a vein of contemptuous flippancy, which made him seem to her quite a different person ; and a little later, though from quite a different cause, he became in her eyes removed from her yet further. In a changed tone he mentioned to the Princess that he had heard that evening from two English statesmen, Lord B—— and Mr. W——. The Princess in former days had known both of them well, and she began to discuss their characters with him, and exchange stories about them ; and from them they passed on to other public characters. Mrs. Schilizzi listened to what was said, as if it were a sound from some inaccessible world, to whose inhabitants she herself meant nothing. Till they separated for the night, she hardly again addressed him ; but then, as she turned to go, a part of what was in her mind expressed itself.

"I ought," she said, "to thank you again for that beautiful expedition of yesterday ; but don't"—and her lips as well as her voice trembled—"don't laugh at me for all the nonsense I talked to you. How could I have done so ? I can hardly bear to think of it."

"Laugh at you!" he exclaimed. "My dear Mrs. Schilizzi, if your conversation were the kind of thing to be laughed at, I only wish I had friends who would make me laugh oftener."

His voice was full of a careless but genial frankness which certainly showed her that her specific request was unnecessary; but he wounded her more than he would have done had he been less prompt in his assurance, because he showed so little comprehension of the doubts he dispelled so carelessly. When she reached her room, she sank into a chair before the looking-glass, and sat abstractedly staring at her own reflection. At last she was startled at seeing tears gathering in her eyes. She rose abruptly, and hid her face in her pillow. "Never, never, never," she murmured, sobbing, "never again will I show my thoughts to any one. The moment I do so, something or other nips them, and they lie on my mind like so many withered daisies." The image of Grenville had no part in her trouble, except as a far-off figure which pointed to her own loneliness; and by and by, when she sank into a weary sleep, there was still a line of pain on her upturned childish forehead, and a tear had trickled and lost itself in the frills round her slim throat.

Grenville meanwhile was in a very different mood. He was seated at his writing-table, with all the air of a man who has work before him of an anxious and urgent kind; and a certain letter was absorbing his whole attention. It came from his man of business, and its purport was not agreeable. It told him that his aunt, his nearest living relative, who depended for the decencies, if not for the necessities, of her life, on the few hundreds a year which he allowed her out of his limited income, had brought herself, by a foolish speculation, to temporary but extreme distress. Without understanding the real extent of her liability, she had bought a number of shares, not fully paid, in a mine; and circumstances having suddenly rendered another call necessary, the payment of this, which was demanded under threat of legal proceedings, had been made by her in fear and trembling, and had left her for the time penniless. "Unwilling," the writer continued, "to apply for help to you, who have done, and who do, so much for her, she hoped by selling a little plate, and by practising various economies, to be able to get through the crisis without your hearing of its occurrence; but you will see from the details, which I enter on a separate sheet, that this

was quite impossible. When I last saw her—she has consulted me several times—I found that she had discharged all but one of her servants. It was a chilly day, and there was hardly any fire in her grate. She was looking at a few old miniatures, and wondering if she could sell them; and I noticed that her hands were trembling not with agitation only, but with cold. For her immediate wants, I advanced her a small sum myself. But to relieve her effectually, about two hundred and fifty pounds will be required; and reluctant as I am to appeal to you in the matter, I feel I am bound to do so, though I do so without her knowledge.”

Grenville laid the letter down with a frown of annoyed perplexity. “Two hundred and fifty pounds,” he said to himself; “I doubt if I have as much as that at my banker’s.” He meditated. “Damn that doctor,” he exclaimed, “if he hadn’t robbed me, I could have managed it.” Then his mind changed. “Poor devil,” he thought, “I caught sight of him as I drove away from Lichtenbourg. How much better he looked! I was glad to think of what I had done for him. He had one of his children with him—a little girl; and he was smiling at her. I like the man, and good luck to him!” He now smiled himself, but at a new train of reflections. “Here am I,” he thought, “fancying myself a great man; flattered by ambassadors, bowed down to by officials; received by hotel-keepers as some wonderful *grand seigneur*, and comporting myself as if nothing and nobody were good enough for me; and yet if I write a cheque for a paltry sum like this, I shall hardly have money enough left to carry me back to England. What an amusing contrast between my apparent position and my real one! All the fine fortunes I have fancied myself already possessed of, are no more help to me now than the sight of land to a swimmer who will probably—and this may be my own case—drown before he reaches it. Anyhow, let me know the worst.”

He turned to his banker’s book; and half flinching as he did so, began to examine his account.

“It is worse than I thought,” he said. “I have barely a hundred left. Up to three hundred, no doubt, I could overdraw; but supposing I pay this money, how shall I stand myself?” For the least selfish of men it would have been a very natural question; but even before he had answered it, he considered one point as settled—and that was his payment of

the whole sum required. The economies that would be necessary on his own part he now proceeded to calculate; and he soon decided, although with extreme reluctance, that he would have to cut short his travels, and at once return to London.

Quickly as his decision was taken, it was taken with a pang of disappointment, which he bore in the best way possible by refusing to think how keen it was. With a nervous haste he passed to his other letters, as if he counted on finding in them some help to distraction. He began with the two which he had glanced at before dinner; and if he sought distraction, they were unexpectedly successful in bringing it to him. One was from no less a person than the Prime Minister himself, and contained a compliment which he had never expected from that quarter—a request for his opinion on certain important matters, which would form the subject of an impending debate in Parliament. The other was from the Chancellor of the Exchequer, which was even more encouraging. “I cannot,” it said, “too highly praise you for the extreme lucidity of your last communication—especially those parts of it in which you work out your suggestions with regard to the claims of the Turkish and Egyptian bondholders. I believe that with you, and with you alone, will be the credit of showing us our way out of an extremely troublesome difficulty. I may tell you that Lord Solway—by the by, is he a relation of yours?—who is an authority of considerable weight on most of our Eastern questions, was asking me about you only two nights ago; and I said to him just what I have said to yourself now; His answer was, ‘Then by G— he has done more for the Government than if he had won a dozen contested seats.’”

Grenville now turned to an envelope which he had not yet opened, and which in one corner bore the signature “Solway.” Its contents were as follows:—

“MY DEAR MR. GRENVILLE,—If only your grandfather, whom I remember well—and charming he was too, with a charm that exists no longer—had not been a person of such nice social taste, and had appreciated less keenly the privilege of consorting with ‘the First Gentleman in Europe,’ you would yourself be in a position to aspire, without arrogance, to the hand of any young lady, no matter how distinguished, provided that her father was not a king or a nobody. But

as matters stand, there is hardly a mother in England—I refer to mothers of daughters in any way suitable to yourself—who would not object to you in the character of a son-in-law quite as openly as she would value you in the character of a friend and guest. You are indeed an excellent example of the way, so much admired by the pious, in which Providence visits on the children the sins and extravagances of fathers. As you are not, however, a Nonconformist minister, you will I trust not be shocked at me when I tell you my own conviction, that half our duty to Providence consists in dishing it, and, if we cannot get rid of errors, at least getting rid of their consequences. I propose, therefore, if you will allow me, to assist in dishing Providence, as far as regards yourself. I know by this time quite enough of what there is in you, to be satisfied that you have before you a brilliant and serviceable career; and I will impute your success to you before you have actually achieved it. Why should you waste any longer time in waiting? If you can manage to do so, you may propose to my niece to-morrow. I don't advise you to do that exactly, for it would have to be done by telegraph; but at all events use whatever expedition you can: and I will tell you how, without the telegraph, you can be quite as expeditious as is necessary. My sister and her two daughters are just starting for Italy. They are going to Milan, Padua, Vicenza, and at last to Venice. I will send you to-morrow an exact calendar of their movements; and then, my advice is, join them. And now, by way of saying something specially pleasant at parting, I may as well tell you this. Evelyn's cousin—young Oliver Jackson—a good-looking boy, but to my mind a monstrous prig, has excited her admiration by the degree he has taken at Oxford, and—people think I'm blind, but I see as much as the best of them—has been lending her books, which she takes and reads with gratitude. There's nothing in this thus far. It's all very silly and natural; but none the less you must remember, as Byron said from experience, 'There is a tide in the affairs of women.' And if you don't know that by this time, I needn't attempt to teach it to you."

As Grenville read this, something that was not trouble exactly, but excitement mixed with anxiety, not only took possession of his face, but also expressed itself in his movements. He rose from his seat, paced the room restlessly, smoked some

cigarettes in order to calm his nerves, and finally, with an impatient rapidity, undressed himself and went to bed.

Early next morning he sent a note to the Princess, to tell her he was wanted in England, and must start that afternoon for Vienna. She was sincerely annoyed at this, and when she met him at luncheon, she was armed with a piece of news which made her regret stronger. She put into his hand a picture she had just received from the agent—a picture of a castle on the summit of a wooded rock. "Could you only have stayed," she said, "you might easily have seen that. It is said to be by far the most curious place in the country." The moment he looked at it, it struck him as being familiar; and he presently recognized it as the castle which he had seen, with such wonder, from the railway. He eyed the picture wistfully, and a strong wish came over him not to quit these regions of yet unexhausted dreams. He passed it to Mrs. Schilizzi, who took it with a distant smile. When she examined it, she softly exclaimed, "How curious!" That was her only comment, but she kept it beside her plate, and throughout the meal her eyes were continually turning to it.

As for Grenville, whatever his regrets were, they did not interfere with the decision and promptness of his movements. There was a train for Vienna at five in the afternoon, going by the direct route, and arriving early in the morning: and by it he had arranged to take his departure. The station for this was seven or eight miles distant; so his hours with his friends were already almost numbered. "I suppose," he said to the Princess, "if my business is done quickly, you will let me come back and finish my explorations?"

"Do," she said, brightening up at the idea. "You must remember I feel you are treating me very badly. However, I'll come to the door with you, and give you a parting kick."

Mrs. Schilizzi came too, with her pair of fair-eyed children, and watched with a quiet face the carriage disappear from the archway.

CHAPTER XI.

EXCITED as Grenville was by the future that was now dazzling him, he could not help reflecting, for the first mile or so of his drive, on another drive he had taken only two days ago, when he had had a companion by his side, and had seemed to be drifting into fairyland. But he soon got rid of this not very violent sentiment, and turned his thoughts to his own situation and prospects. His immediate financial difficulties he viewed with diminished anxiety; and though a journey to Italy would be a new strain on his resources, he felt confident he should manage to meet it somehow. But one thought which had been forced on him last night had become more startling and more persistent than ever; and this was the thought of the extreme weakness and insecurity of his own position in the world, as it actually was at present. Another such claim as that which he was now about to meet would reduce him to penury. A fall of five shillings in the rent of each of his acres would reduce him to ruin yet more complete and hopeless. Nothing but his wits would be left him between himself and starvation. Many people, he reflected, considered him as a social light. He seemed to himself but a small flickering taper, which the slightest breath might at any moment extinguish.

He allowed his mind to dwell upon, and even exaggerate, facts like these, in order to add to the value of the release from them that was being now made so easy for him; and without intentionally constructing any picture of his future, details of it unbidden thrust themselves in upon his consciousness. He saw his name in half the papers of Europe. In various capitals, and at Vienna especially, he saw himself the object of peculiar social consideration. In London his lodgings, and his one manservant, gave place to a large and decorous house and household. He saw a star in his coat, and a phantom ribbon across his breast. From time to time also he saw at his side a wife. Now her happy eyes were making a light in his solitude; now he and she were being announced at some brilliant party. And yet all these images, somehow, to his own surprise, pleasing as they were, did but excite him moderately.

"I wonder," he thought, as he found himself alone in the

railway-carriage, "if from everything in life that we desire, the best part of its charm takes flight as we approach it, or becomes invisible, like a rainbow. Perhaps the truth is, that even the best of good things find the mind hardly prepared for them, if they are too brusquely thrust on one."

Thus reflecting, he took from his bag some photographs, and began meditatively to look at them. One was a portrait of a girl—the same which a few days since he had turned to and apostrophized in his bedroom at the Princess's castle. The others were views, amongst them being those of the house which had roused the admiration of the lover, on the journey from Paris to Vienna. This house and its surrounding landscape were both evidently beautiful; though a broken bridge and a half-roofless boat-house, even in the photograph, betrayed poverty and neglect. The house itself too, to the eyes of Grenville, who was its owner, told the same story. Certain sinkings of the roof, certain S-shaped iron ties visible on the walls, meant for him that it was fast falling to pieces; that the present tenants would soon find it uninhabitable; whilst years of his present income would not suffice to repair it. But so far as beauty went, it was still perfect: it might even be called magnificent; and his eyes rested on every detail lingeringly. There it stood with its lines of mullioned windows, with its twisted pillars and chimney-stacks, with its domed turrets, and its vanes, facing the present with a forlorn, pathetic dignity. But this was far from being to him its sole suggestion. It brought back to him his own early days, and the growing embarrassments of his family. He remembered the straitened life that was masked by those stately walls—the few servants, the wilderness of unused rooms, the meagre fare, the one horse in the stables. He remembered his discovering, and his boyish inability to believe it, that his people used, in the county, to be talked of as "those poor Grenvilles." He remembered how the wife of a stockbroker who had intrigued herself into London society, and had taken a place in the neighbourhood with some of the best shooting in England, had brought to a county ball an omnibus-load of lords and ladies, and on the strength of her diamonds and her company had presumed to be supercilious to his mother. Memory after memory of the same kind came back to him, each with the sting in it of some humiliating circumstance. Then from the views of his own house he turned to one of another. This was a plain structure,

with a centre and two wings, all whitewash and windows, except for an entrance portico. It was bald and hideous, and of no exceptional size ; but even the photograph showed that it was kept in perfect order ; and its hideousness, as every detail of it proclaimed, was at least made respectable by having lasted a hundred years. " And so," thought Grenville, " that is to be my wife's dowry, given her with the special purpose of saving her husband's fortunes, and calling life back to those old walls that are dying. It will be quite sufficient, if only we take our time ; and I can solace my pride with this reflection at all events—that if the two properties are united, I shall not only have saved my own, but have given to my wife something that is worth saving."

He replaced the pictures in the case from which he had taken them ; and leaning back, he began, with a gathering frown, to see certain facts facing him, which were not quite satisfactory. These had reference to his position with regard to the lady whom he had, in his thoughts about the future, been so confidently regarding as his wife. He felt that now, suddenly and for the first time, he realized all that depended on her actually and immediately becoming so ; and an event which he had assumed as certain, when looked on as indefinitely distant, began to seem painfully doubtful, when abruptly brought so close to him.

He set himself to reconsider what grounds he had for his confidence. They were not perhaps of the strongest ; but still they were not so slight as a third party might be apt to think from a statement of them. When Grenville first met, grown up and developed, the Lady Evelyn Standish, whom he had known familiarly in his childhood, he had divined almost instantly a number of minute things which, as a woman, distinctly marked her character. She was not a woman by whom the majority of men would be attracted, or any man for mere purposes of amusement ; nor would men in general, as men, have much attraction for her. He saw all this in her eyes, almost as soon as he looked at them. Frank and friendly as they were, they would never expand or soften, except under the influence of a feeling which, though she might not understand it, sprang from the very depths of her life, and would not be excited readily. His instinct taught him thus much ; but it did not teach him one thing, which before very long his surprised observation did ; and this was

that a feeling of precisely the kind in question had, if signs meant anything, been excited in her by himself. What made him confident that his observation did not deceive him, was no vanity on his part, but his complete belief in her genuineness : and in thinking of what had happened, he was touched rather than flattered. He had, as he confessed in his diary, soon begun to experience a strong inclination to develop and return her feeling ; but until he had explained himself to her guardian he had simply kept this in check, and after the explanation his part had become a delicate one. Unauthorized as yet to make to her any distinct advances, fearful of trifling with her affection, and equally fearful of chilling it, he had endeavoured to maintain with her a kind of balanced relationship, which might either be warmed into love or allowed to fade into friendship. The virtual request indeed which his conduct had to convey, and to convey in such a way that she should feel rather than know its meaning, was simply this, if put into vulgar language—"Give me the refusal of you till I see if I can make you an offer."

Everything however, in such cases, depends for its ease or difficulty on the precise characters and temperaments of the two persons concerned ; and Grenville felt that the character and the temperament of Lady Evelyn made a situation almost simple, which many women would have made impossible. He believed her inclination for himself to be quite sufficiently deep to obviate, for a time at all events, any danger of a rival ; and yet to be so placid that, should such a fate be in store for it, it would die of a gradual decline, without serious pain. He had had, therefore, up to the present juncture, very good if not very apparent reasons, for trusting that, as soon as he could ask her, she would be his for the trouble of asking ; though it must be admitted that his trust owed part of its tranquillity to the fact that passion had here hardly been strong enough to amuse itself with inflicting on him its customary doubts as to its object. But now, though passion had nothing to do with the change, his tranquillity began to be disturbed, and to give place to anxiety. The more he thought on the subject as the train went rumbling on, the more did this anxiety grow on him ; and it filled him at last with a fever of impatient longing to be face to face with the lady without a day's unnecessary delay, and to be taking steps to dispose of his doubts for ever.

Morning was gray on the dewy pavements of Vienna as he drove to the Hôtel Impérial. Could he have done so, he would have gone at once to the Embassy, to see if Lord Solway's promised letter had arrived. Exhaustion, however, gave him enough philosophy to submit to the comforts of sleep and a spring mattress; and before he was up the expected letter was brought to him. It was short, and much to the point. "My sister and her daughters," said Lord Solway, "leave for Paris to-night, and will arrive at Vicenza—you will be good enough to pay attention to dates—three days from now. They will remain there for the inside of a week, as they are going to try to get for me some chimney-pieces and doors in a certain dismantled palace. I saw them two years ago, but the price asked was exorbitant, and I had no time to bargain. My sister is going to attempt doing so for me; and I told her this—that I had asked you, as I knew you were coming that way, to join her if possible, and help her in her negotiations. This should reach you in time to give you one day's grace for preparations; but if you are to catch them, you must be off the morning after. I enclose you a photograph of young Oliver Jackson, with his spectacles in one hand, and Aristotle's Ethics in the other. If you like the look of him, you may perhaps meet him at Venice. He will not be at Vicenza. You will admit, I think, that I have made matters pretty smooth for you."

No news, except perhaps the last item, could in itself have been more welcome to Grenville. He had however by no means calculated on being driven to such instant action. His settled intentions had been to go first to London, and do what he could in assisting his poor old helpless relation, pictures of whose distress had been constantly presenting themselves to his mind. And now it perversely happened that if he should do this, his own golden opportunity would be lost. Suddenly he saw a way—a simple way—out of the difficulty. Springing out of bed he wrote a note to his bankers, to tell them that he might have presently to overdraw his account, which, as on a former occasion, they doubtless would let him do. He then drew a cheque for a hundred pounds, and enclosed it to his man of business, for his aunt's immediate relief, promising if possible to be in London the following week, and in any case to provide such further sums as might be necessary.

With Lord Solway's letter another had arrived from the

Embassy—a line written by the Ambassadors, begging him to come to luncheon. His own plans being as far as possible settled, he longed for distraction, and accepted the invitation gladly. It seemed that Vienna still must be full of English, for he found his hostess surrounded by a party of London acquaintances. Most of them were ladies; and to judge from their conversation, they had brought their own newest gossip with them, along with their jewels and their dresses.

"My dear," one of them was saying to the Ambassadors, "there's no holding Theresa since she's got her new tiara; though who gave it her—there of course is the mystery."

"Tell me," said the Ambassadors, "about Lady ——'s ball. She's grown so smart, I hear, that she won't ask her own daughters. Lucy, were you there?"

"No, my dear—I'm not smart."

"A woman," said an old dandy with a face cut like a cameo, and a delicate hesitation in his voice; "a woman like Lady ——, when she gives a ball like this, takes a great deal more pleasure in thinking of the people she hasn't invited, than of the people she has."

The sound of all this was familiar enough to Grenville, and not long since he would have been amused by it; but now it came to him like a sound heard in a dream. It was flat and unreal in a way he could not account for. He did indeed by an effort laugh and talk as usual; but nothing roused in him any real interest, till he heard of the latest romance, and the latest scandal of Vienna; and this was the infatuation of the ex-King of Moldavia for a young unmarried girl—the new beauty of the season, who had shocked society by the audacity with which she had encouraged him, and who proved to be none other than Miss Juanita Markham. Amongst the company were two of the most amusing women in London. But he only wondered now how he could ever have been entertained by either. For a moment indeed he thought better of them, when they began to talk about Hungary; but he presently found this topic less inspiring than any, because it made him long to be back again in the scenes he had just quitted.

Returning to his hotel, discontented he knew not why, he learnt from Fritz, who had been devoting himself to a study of time-tables, that the journey to Vicenza would occupy thirty hours, and that if he wished to arrive there on the day specified, the best thing he could do would be to start by the express

that evening. He hailed the intelligence with delight. He felt that were he only moving again—moving to the event on which his future depended, and to the woman who he hoped would share it, his discontent would vanish and the colours of life grow bright again.

He found that experience hardly fulfilled his anticipations; but how his condition was affected by what took place at Vicenza will be best described hereafter in his own words. It will be enough for the present to say that, having remained there several days, he had left under circumstances which, to judge from his face and bearing, had not indeed elated him, or freed him from all anxiety, but had still afforded him some grounds for satisfaction; and he had, with no companion excepting his faithful servant, indulged himself in the pleasure of visiting some places of interest in the district. One morning he had risen very early, so as to make an expedition to a villa built by Palladio, sequestered in the country, and far from the nearest town. He was standing in its pale colonnade, which, from the side of a low hill, overlooked the sea-like Venetian plain. There was still a rawness in the air, and a mist that smelt of fields and damp vineyards, and that touched his forehead and stirred his thoughts refreshingly. He thought of that first drive of his, the morning after he had reached Lichtenbourg. He had just been through the principal range of rooms. The stuccoed exterior of the building, and the ragged grass-plot in front of it, had disappointed him; but the moment he entered, disappointment had been lost in wonder. Every foot of wall and ceiling, in each smallest ante-chamber no less than in the largest hall, was covered with gorgeous frescoes—the work of Paul Veronese. The shining floors reflected antique Venetian furniture. Furniture and frescoes alike were perfect, and untouched by time. As Grenville stood, gazing at the distant levels, out of which here and there rose a tall solitary campanile, he suddenly ejaculated, "What a fool I am! I declare that never occurred to me. Fritz," he shouted, "come here. I want to speak to you. You know in my rooms in London the picture—that by Paul Veronese—that hangs usually above the sideboard. Was that left on the wall, or was it locked up in the cupboard where I keep my papers?" Fritz replied, as if owning to some negligence, that it was left on the wall; but no reproof was inflicted on him. On the contrary, his master muttered to himself with com-

placence, "That then settles everything. A dealer has twice offered me five hundred pounds for it. Before a week is over he shall have lodged that sum at my banker's. I can settle my business without going back to London. And now—now—at least for another month, wherever my wishes draw me, I am free to follow them."

CHAPTER XII.

THE white houses and the emerald leafage of Lichtenbourg had the glow on them of a warm, peach-coloured sunset. During the last few days the rapid spring had been busy, multiplying flower and bud. It had also called into existence a number of new visitors. It was not a number that by any means amounted to a crowd, but it still was sufficient to give an air of life to the place; and the walks and seats in the square on which the restaurant opened were gay with a sprinkling of company, looking forward to dinner. The eye was at once caught by various feminine dresses, most of them rather startling, a few exceedingly pretty; and by some officers in uniform, ready to scrutinize and admire them: whilst the prettiest dress of all, surmounted by the prettiest hat, illuminated the seat which was most open to observation, and shared it with an officer whose good fortune was widely envied. The officer himself evidently considered it enviable, and was making the most of his voice and his handsome eyes; whilst the eyes of his companion, and the delicate colour in her cheeks, seemed to show that she was excited, even if not pleased, with her situation. He was talking to her now in French, now in German; and he was just in the middle of a quotation from a French song, which his manner showed that he considered extremely telling.

"Qui veut oûir, qui veut savoir
Comment les diplomats aiment."

"Ils aiment," he was continuing, with an insinuating smile, "ils aiment si diplomatiquement," when he saw to his

mortification the lady's eyes wander, and her expression completely change. She rose suddenly from her seat, and moved forward to meet a man who, he was conscious, had stopped just in front of them. This man's expression too, as well as that of the lady, was troubled and discomposed. Pleasure, surprise, and a something that was not pleasure, succeeded each other on his face, and remained there mixed together. As the two greeted each other, a very acute observer might have seen that their cordiality, or at least its extreme openness, was due to nervousness quite as much as to feeling. The officer, however, was far from being acute; and having borne neglect heroically for the better part of a minute, he rose, lit a cigar, and catching the eye of the lady, whilst pique shone in his own, he forced a smile, made a bow, and departed. Had he waited a moment longer he would not perhaps have fled so precipitately; for the manner of the lady and her friend, as soon as the greeting was over, grew rapidly more constrained, and almost suggested coldness.

"Do you know, Mr. Grenville, I was never so surprised in my life," the lady was saying. "I thought you must have been your ghost."

"Well," he answered, "and I really believe I might have been, for since I last saw you, I have been through a kind of death. My dear Mrs. Schilizzi, you needn't look so concerned. If I told you what I meant, you would say—Is it only that?"

"Well," she laughed, "at all events that's a comfort; but what you said had a most tragic sound in it. I thought you were in England."

"I have managed," he replied, "to settle my business without going there; and I have done now what, if possible, I always meant to do—come back here to see the castle whose photograph we were looking at, at luncheon. It seems a year ago to me, that does; so much has happened since then."

"To me, too, it seems ages."

"Is that," he said, "because so much has happened to you also?"

"It is rather," she replied, "because nothing has."

She had not resumed her seat. They were walking together slowly. They were silent for a few moments; and then with a constrained indifference, "You have, at any rate, found," he said, "a very attentive acquaintance."

She looked up at him with a half mischievous smile.

"What," she asked, "do you mean that Austrian captain? I met him at Vienna at a public ball last year. Perhaps he is, now that you come to mention it, one of the things that has made my time pass slowly. He's handsome, and could be pleasant if he'd never open his mouth. As it is, he's been boring my very life out; and the only pleasure he's given me is the thought that he goes to-morrow."

At this news Grenville's expression softened. He asked her where she dined. She told him in her own rooms, adding that she had letters to write, and would not reappear that evening.

"Then perhaps," said Grenville, "I shall see you to-morrow morning. Will you let me tell you my adventures? And if we find it can be managed, perhaps you will make another expedition with me?"

"I can never," she said, "see you in the morning. Quite early, I teach my children, and after that I am busy with something of my own. In spite of the charms of your friend, the Austrian officer, I have been obliged to make an occupation for many hours of solitude."

"And what occupation is that?" he asked.

"I wonder," she said, half flippantly, "if I can tell you; you'll only laugh if I do. What do you think it is? I have begun writing a diary."

"I too not long since began doing the same thing. I dare say we're not singular. My diary, I find, has one merit at all events: my last few days in Italy have turned it into a book of surprises."

"Italy!" she exclaimed. "And have you been in Italy? I should like to hear about that. One of these days you will perhaps tell me—that is to say if you are not leaving directly. Good-bye, it is late—I must be going in to my children."

As she said this they were just at the entrance of the hotel; and, without giving him time to detain her by some question which she saw was on his lips, she ran up the steps, throwing a parting smile at him, and was lost to sight in the shadow within the doorway.

Grenville was not much pleased by this abrupt ending of the interview; and after dinner he loitered in the neighbourhood of the band, hoping that after all he should find a chance of renewing it. But he looked in vain for her. She had been quite sincere in saying that the whole of that evening she

meant to give to her letters; and she was, indeed, in her sitting-room with envelopes and paper before her. These, however, she presently pushed aside. "I can't," she murmured, and drawing towards her some sheets of foolscap, she began, not to write, but to read something already written on them. This was the beginning of her diary.

What she read was as follows—

"Different people write diaries for different reasons and objects; some because they do so much else, others because they have so little else to do; some to record what they have seen, others to record only what they have *been*. As for me, the last case is mine. I have done nothing and seen nothing. What I have *been* is my only history. And why am I going to write it—or try to write it? Not because I am idle, but because I am lonely, and I must speak to something—I must be myself somehow. I write for the same sort of reason that makes a boy sing, or a woman at times sob. Just as a sob relieves the heart, so will this writing relieve something else in me—something—I don't know what.

"But before I do so, I want to assure myself of one thing—that I am not like a silly sentimental school-girl, sighing and crying over her own fancies. I have known some girls—girls who have kept diaries, and who have used them like looking glasses in which they made interesting faces at themselves. I am not like that, I wish to see myself as I am and have been; and I shall try to record this, and I believe I shall be able to do so. I don't know life, but I do at least know my own life, uneventful as it must seem to every human being that has known me. Its events have been all within. I know the difference between fact and fancy; but I do not know the difference between fact and feeling. There are facts which are not feelings, but all feelings are facts, and the only facts which give the others any meaning. What would action be if it affected nobody's feelings? It might as well be something taking place in Jupiter. What would thought be if we felt nothing? Thought at its highest is but the genius, the slave of the lamp, who either guides feeling or works for it.

"Yes, but granting all this, here comes another question which will trouble me till I have made my answer to it. My life may consist of facts, even though it only consists of feelings. True—but are they facts worth having their

history written? Will my sense of the ridiculous allow me to think they are? It will, and for this reason. Every human being may not be a good model to draw, but every human body would be a good subject to dissect—how much, more every human soul! Who am I? What am I? I am, nobody, and less than nothing. I am not even one of my own few possibilities. I know it. And yet if human existence has any meaning at all, my life must have some meaning also. None of us is worth anything, if any one of us is not worth something.

“How philosophical I am! But I am going to be philosophical no longer. I sink, with a sudden fall, to the style of a foolish woman.

“I call this a diary. It will at first be a memoir, for I can only get at myself by going first back to my childhood. The chief characteristic of my life I can trace in it even then—that I was alone. My own mind was my only real playground. I do not mean that I was an only child, or that in any marked way I isolated myself from my brothers and sisters. On the contrary, I laughed and romped and played in the hay, and climbed trees, with them. But as I dangled my legs from the boughs—I remember it still so clearly—what filled my consciousness was the world of leafy branches and the green lights which seemed, in some strange way, to hint to me of another life. When I lay amongst the hay and looked up at the sky, the clouds were enchanted mountains, and I wandered amongst their dissolving passes.

“How often have I heard people say that self-analysis is morbid. But what I am writing now is not self-analysis; I only wish it were; I wish that myself then were myself now. Oh, little girl who art lost, who never can live again, I can think about you and describe you as if you were some one else! The sole link between us is the nerve called memory—that is so often aching—and the pronoun ‘I.’

“And yet, perhaps, I am wrong. As I write on, I shall see.

“My father and mother were both people of family, though they never mixed in what is commonly called the world; but in both their characters was a certain pride, which though we were not important enough for it to develop in us exclusiveness, did develop something which is nearly the same—seclusiveness. All my childhood was spent in an enclosed garden.

"And what sort of childhood was it? I have said something about it already, but not all I want to say. In going on I feel a kind of diffidence. It is easy enough to say that my life was a life of loneliness, but it is not so easy to say—at least I shrink in doing so—that the heart of that loneliness was religion. But so it was. Nobody would have thought so, and clergymen would not admit that I am using the word rightly. For I do not mean that I was always going to church, or always or indeed often saying my prayers; but I was full of the longing that moves people to pray, and to do and feel many other things besides. It was a longing for something beyond and above me, and at the same time about me, but always eluding me. I saw it in the sky and in the woods, and I heard it in church when the organ sounded. As for what people commonly call religion, I had to pick up my knowledge of that pretty much for myself, for mother was born a Catholic, though she went to the English church; and my father, though a very good man, had, I believe, only one religious belief, and this was that the Church of Rome was wrong. Still I was confirmed; and when I went to my first communion, I felt—I can't express it now; but it was something the same feeling I had when first I saw the sea; or when the sky, or a flower, or anything, struck me suddenly with its depth of beauty. I remember so well how on such occasions as these I used sometimes to whisper to myself 'How beautiful!' and sometimes 'God, be good to me!' It was a chance which of the two I whispered; I meant the same by both.

"I remember also another thing, which makes me laugh as I think of it. I used often—as most girls do—to stand looking at myself in the glass; and the beauty of my own reflection, such as it was, moved me and troubled me, much as other beauty did. I never thought—never, so far as I can remember, 'There's beautiful me.' I only thought, 'There's a beautiful something.' I seemed to myself, as I looked at my cheeks, to be merely like a flower given into my own keeping, and I wondered about the meaning of the petals, and was half frightened at their delicacy.

"Idiot that I am to write these trifles down! And yet am I? They are facts—hard, unvarnished facts of a life that at all events was quite free from affectations. And why should the movements of a young girl's thoughts not

be as well worth recording as the movements of sap in a vegetable?

"Anyhow I have put enough of them down now. I go on to what is broader. All these feelings of mine, for the sky, the sea, for church music, or my own complexion, were only manifestations of a constant something within me, panting to fulfil itself, and not knowing how.

"But, though it did not know, it was always trying to find out; and these attempts form really the whole history of my girlhood. Poetry, drawing, music, and then knowledge—hard, dry knowledge—I tried them all. I am not talking of what I did in the school-room—that counts for nothing. I am talking only of what I did by myself, and with my whole heart prompting me. And indeed everything that came home to me I had to pick up in this way, much as I did my instruction about religion, without any help or guidance. What volumes of poetry at one time I knew by heart! I found them all out for myself, and took to them only because I hoped to find in them some answer to the question, 'What is it that I long for?' But they did not quiet me, they only made me more restless; and I felt an impulse to do—to fulfil myself by action. I tried to draw and paint, and till I saw I could do neither, for a good six months I was almost beside myself with hope. Then I think came music. Could I only have done what I attempted, the music of the spheres would have been nothing to what I should have extracted from a cottage piano. But the keys at last became like a row of tombstones, forming a cemetery in which my attempts were buried. After that I began to read books of science and philosophy, full of hard words the meaning of which I had to guess at; and it seemed to me for a considerable time that what I longed for was to be found in the satisfaction of the intellect. What ideas I had! How my mind rode away on them as if they were wings! I used to work them out in things that I called essays, trembling with pride as I wielded the long words of Mr. Herbert Spencer. And then, generally by the time I had read a little more, I found all the profundities I had arrived at were mere truisms or common-places, or that else they were nonsense. But I was not discouraged—at least not for a long time. Perhaps—perhaps—I am not wholly discouraged now. If I am, I am done for.

"And all this while, what became of my religion—I mean

my religion of prayers and church-going? I can't quite tell. The whole history of it is so vague. The fact is, about such matters I was not very clear, to begin with; and with me, feeling, and faith, and longing, and self-prostration were so much more than any defined beliefs, that I hardly noticed how these last were gradually sapped by the books which I read so eagerly, and how so much of what the clergyman said came gradually to seem so foolish. But I think it was only the words that I heard in church that lost their power over me. I put these aside as one might put aside the libretto of an opera which had some connection with the music, but only an insufficient one; whilst the meaning of the music itself still remained the same for me, and shook my heart as the organ shook the windows. How often contrition—I can't tell for what—came trembling into me, and the spirit of prayer bowed me, as the wind bends corn! But what came oftenest was mere adoration—mere longing—again I can't tell for what; but all was for the same thing that I felt in nature, that I tried to capture in drawing, and to express in music, and to find in thought and study. Some people, who lose any of the definite beliefs which they learnt as children, experience much misery at the loss. I don't think I did; and the reason was what I have just stated—that the definite part of religion was to me the least important part. Indeed I remember saying to myself one day in church, when the clergyman was preaching about Joshua's moon in Ajalon, 'Perhaps I have not got a religion, but I myself am religion.' I meant, 'I am a-longing for whatever will most completely fulfil myself,' and my only articulate prayer was little more than this—'Reveal to me what I long for, and unite me completely with it.'

"If any one besides myself were to read these confessions, I know one thing which he or she would say—'This silly girl in search of an object for her sentiment, did it never occur to her to fancy herself in love? Did she never try to solve her perplexities that way?' Yes and no—but much more no than yes. Love did enter into my thoughts; but let me explain how. I felt myself capable of it; but I felt this in some far-off way. As for associating the idea of it with any one I ever met, that seemed to me sacrilege. I felt it to be something which was so sacred, and which, if it came, would be so overwhelming, that it frightened me. It made me afraid of myself, as if I held within me some mystery. One or two

men—indeed more than one or two, whilst I was still quite young—fell in love with me. Instead of being flattered or touched by this, I felt it as a kind of impertinence, and I was glad when I saw how very easily I could repulse them. They, I believe, thought I was heartless. I was not. It was because I revered my heart so much, and felt in such awe of the Unknown contained in it, that I was indignant at them for presuming to think about it. Could I only love—this is the thought that would come to me—what would the feeling be? I should die of it. Where would it carry me? I was afraid to go on thinking. I only knew this, that I never had seen any one, and could not imagine any one, who would justify the feeling in me, and make it not seem wicked. I remember still how afraid I grew of myself. I hardly dared even, at one time, to read Keats' poetry, it moved me so, without any justifying cause.

"The only emotion, the only love, that I could indulge in frankly, and that supported and did not frighten me, was love of my parents. They didn't understand me—I always felt that; but I felt that they desired my welfare; and though they could not share my thoughts, it seemed to me that they sheltered them. What was my pain then when one day, quite by accident, I heard mother saying this to father—'Irma is so pretty that she ought to marry well.' And then, before I could get out of hearing, I caught the name of a neighbouring country squire. I had no dislike to the man—I thought nothing about him; but to hear him mentioned in this way, was like hearing a knife talked about that was to be drawn across my throat. After that, for three weeks I was miserable. Father and mother couldn't tell what had come to me; and when a letter arrived from my aunt, asking me to stay with her in Hungary, they thought the change would be good for me, and gladly let me go. I too was half glad; but I had a little garden where I used to work by myself; and I was sorry to leave that, and my poor little book-shelf full of well-worn books, some of which were children's fairy-stories. It was arranged that a friend of my aunt's who was going there at the same time should look after me on the journey. I knew nothing of him, till I saw him, except his name and the fact that he was very rich; and after I had seen him, I knew nothing more for weeks, except that he had almond-shaped eyes, a straight nose, and a smile; that he talked rather fast,

and that he talked a great deal to me. My aunt told me that if he had wished it the Emperor would have made him a baron. A few days later she told me he wished to marry me.

"How I consented I really can hardly tell. Secret correspondence went on between my aunt and my parents; and mother wrote to me and told me how happy my prospects were, and how little money I should ever have of my own; and how sad and anxious she had once been for my future. One reason, I think, why I at length yielded, one reason why I did not shrink from this marriage as I might have done, was just the very fact that for me there was no love in it. Marriage came to me as something completely outside myself: it came to me simply as a new shell of circumstance, into which, with unavowed pressure, mother and all the others pushed me. How could I know what I was doing, or what was being done to me? I had no experience.

"Well, I have experience now. And yet, who would think it? No one who had watched me or lived with me, no matter how constantly or closely. Who could guess the history of my first married years? Certainly not my husband; and for one very sufficient reason, he never would care to try. My brother Robert told me how, when he first went to school, he used to cry to himself at nights, longing for home, thinking with a passionate affection of every worn patch in the carpets, and of the air full of peace and tenderness. For three years after my marriage I did just the same. I had plenty of servants and an extravagant cook; but every time I looked at our smart dinner-table I thought of our school-room meals—our boiled mutton—our rice-pudding; and I longed like a truant to run away and go back to them. What would mother have thought if she had seen me come back to her, and hiding, as I should have liked to hide, my face once more in her lap!

"What could I have told her? How could I have explained such a step? I could not have explained it in any intelligible way to her. I could indeed have summed up my experience in a very few words. I could have said to her, Marriage is the suicide of hope; but I could tell her no facts that would explain so tragic a view. I could have told her that Paul's temper was not always, or often, of the best. In fact when I made mistakes in any little household matters, he was furious with me; and once, though I must say he was handsomely

sorry for it afterwards, he struck me on the wrist with an ivory paper-knife, leaving a mark which for a fortnight I hid with a velvet band. I didn't mind that. Indeed I think the only time that I ever voluntarily kissed Paul was after he had struck me, just to show that I had forgiven him. No—what I minded was not what he was, but the sense which he inflicted on me daily of what he was not. He liked me in a way. In a way he took good care of me. But the way was this; he regarded me as a piece of china, which ornamented his drawing-room, and which had to be dusted carefully. The only difference between me and an *épergne* he was very fond of, was that it stood in the middle of the table, and I sat at the end of it. I was like a book which he valued for the rarity of its binding, but which he neither could nor cared to read. How long I hoped against hope that this might not be true—that he was merely shy, merely slow in understanding me, and that we should at last really become companions! I tried to love him, and to make him love me; and could I only have met with any response from him, to some extent at least, I should have succeeded. I tried every means I could think of. In the afternoon I used to hurry home, in order to meet him when he returned from the railway he was then making. I did all I could to look glad and happy when I saw him. But the only result was this. Five minutes after I was in the drawing-room he was sure to go out of it; and if ever I ventured to follow him into his study, he invariably met me by asking me what I wanted. What did I want? It makes me laugh now to think of his asking that of me. It was something, Paul, you could never have understood, if I had told you. But at dinner, Paul, you couldn't rebuff me for being with you; and do you remember how I tried then to find my way into your life? I tried at first to talk about the things that interested me or touched me—about the things that seemed to me to be beautiful, or happy, or sad, or perplexing. Good heavens! I might have been talking Hebrew to you. I put my thoughts into your hands—thoughts which I valued and cherished; and I hoped that you might be pleased with them. But what you did was to stare at them blankly, and then drop them, and let them break themselves into pieces. But still I would not be disheartened. I tried to approach you in another way. As you would not talk to me about my subjects, I tried to talk to you about yours. That

annoyed you still more. It made you rude to me, not only cold. How different you were with men—with the men you brought to dine with you! They and you understood each other. You responded to what they said to you, as if you were a musical instrument touched by them—or rather a band of instruments—a band of instruments at a music-hall. For me, the attempt to talk to you was like going out into a frosty day. How cold I was when I came back to myself again!

“During those three years, it seems to me that I was dead. If it had not been for my two children I should have died literally. I was very fond of them from the first; but babies are not companions. Though they were near my heart, they could not tell how it was aching. Still they kept me alive. They prevented my heart from freezing. But when the eldest began to know me, and speak and understand a little, then I was conscious of some new accession of happiness; and gradually, to my surprise, I felt in better spirits. I felt at last that I was something like myself again; and to Paul’s extreme annoyance, I sang in the hall one morning. He swore at me, and I cried. No matter. What I was going to say was this. This revival of my spirits, through my growing love for my children, had a very odd effect on me. My vanity woke up again. I wanted company, I wanted a little amusement. Sometimes in the afternoon, when I was left all alone, I went to look at myself in the glass, and wish that some one could see me. A woman would have satisfied me. I should often have liked a woman best; but sometimes, I confess, I did wish for a man or two—just for the sake of seeing what effect I produced. My desire for admiration had all the temerity of innocence. That I could do anything wrong, or even wish for it, never seemed possible to me. Well—I made some acquaintances, not amongst Paul’s connections. I made friends with some pretty and well-connected women; and through them I came to know a certain number of men. My wishes soon fulfilled themselves. Every afternoon I had some admiring visitor.

“What things in life can be more different than some of our wishes before their fulfilment and after! These men I speak of—all their attention and homage at first flattered and soothed me after Paul’s neglect. Paul could never see too little of me. They could never see too much. At first this was charming. I really took an interest in some of them, and

thought they did in me. But, little by little, various things enlightened me. These men saw my beauty; but I now divined how they saw it; and they appeared to me hardly human. When their voices grew soft, how I hated them! And yet, in spite of this I allowed them to go on calling on me; and I began to take a sort of perverse pleasure in keeping them captive under false colours. I sheltered my real self—the self they could never understand—under an outer husk of the false self that they imagined; and I thus enjoyed two different sorts of pride—one derived from their admiration of me, the other derived from my contempt for them.

“This has not been good for me; but it led to what was worse. The women with whom I now associated, and who were friends also of these men, almost before I was aware of it, made me one of their sisterhood. I thought they were angels first; and then I learnt that they were not angels. How kind and pleasant they were to me, and what torture they inflicted on me, when they first let me know them thoroughly! What they did, so far as I am concerned, was this. They did not induce me to follow their ways; but they made me familiar with their ideas. One of them lent me a number of French novels. They were novels by celebrated writers—classics; but oh, how wicked they seemed! How wicked the women were in them! I felt this, and yet I read. I read one book after another. But then, after a time, I felt I could stand it no longer. Some of the books I burnt; and others, I don’t know where they are.

“If any one else—I again come back to that—if any one else were to read what I have just written, what dreadful things he or she would think of me! I should seem to be suggesting so much more than I have said. Wrong! wrong! What I have said has been the uttermost that I mean, so far as badness and folly go. And now I have this to add. These women, these men—their companionship and their flattery, even then, were not all my life, or indeed, I think, the most important part of it. For just as my happiness in my children roused my vanity and my wish for excitement, because it raised my spirits, so did this excitement and this tribute to my vanity revive in me other things, not by raising my spirits but by troubling them. Those dreadful novels were not the only books I read; nor was admiration the only thing I thought of. I took again to my books of science and

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philosophy ; I bought translations of all kinds of classical writers. My old longing to realize my own existence once more took possession of me ; and all the false companionship which I now got, made my mind tumultuous with longing for some companionship that should be true. As to what this true companionship would be, I was as far off as ever from knowing. Would it take the form of knowledge, of beauty, or of a human friend ? I know one thing—that not once, but several times, when the best of my admirers was coming to see me, and I had promised to be in by a certain hour in the afternoon, I forgot all about him in looking at a March sunset from a lonely seat amongst some pine-trees, more than a mile from home.

“And what am I now ? How structureless all my history is ! What I have just written applies to the last four or five years of my life ; and applies to me at this moment. Am I fairly good ? or am I very bad ? Five or six men are, I know, this moment in love with me ; and I have been proud to think they are so. Though I have no love for them myself, is not that bad ? But somehow, when I think it over, it makes me feel, not how bad I am, but how lonely I am. I have never in my whole life been myself to any one. I have so many unuttered thoughts troubling me, and increasing in number, and there is nobody to whom I can tell any of them. I don’t know what I should have been could I only have met some one who would have helped me to live—with whom I could have shared something beyond a part of his income and the parentage of two children—a number that never will be added to.

“Oh, you—what have you done to me ! You took me—you *would* marry me. You took an entire life, and you sacrificed it, in order to ornament one small corner of your own. And I—I tried to love you. I waited for you and watched for you during your absence. I ran to meet you when you came. Your own mind was for me like waterless sand ; none of my thoughts would grow in it. I found that out ; and then what I tried to do was to share that desert with you, acting as if it were some oasis. And I should have succeeded in this had you let me ; in some sort I would have learned to love you : but you repulsed me. Do you remember that night when you struck me, and when I kissed you because I saw that you were sorry ? You were sorry you struck me. You were sorry you had struck a woman. You

were ashamed of yourself ; but not even then did you show any tenderness for me. It is not the blow I remember with any bitterness, but your conduct after.

* And now, whom can I speak to? As I have said, to no one. You have made me bitterly wise. You have taken even my mother from me. Not even to her can I speak with perfect confidence. You have made me feel that she sacrificed her daughter, treated her daughter as a thing without heart or soul. You have driven me into the company of waters, and woods, and sunsets. In nature I do feel a vague something that touches me, that moves in me the religious impulse, that calls me out of myself. And yet whenever I see a beautiful thing, along with the sense of its beauty I have this sense also—that I have no one to whom I can turn and say, ‘ How beautiful ! ’

“ Mother, perhaps, would tell me that I ought to make the best of things. I know she thinks I could be happy and successful socially. Could I? How little she understands the situation as it really is! She sees me, just as I too, for that matter, can see myself in the glass—a woman dressed perfectly from her hat to the tips of her toes: she sees how certain shades of colour become me. She has sometimes told me that I am like an exquisite picture. I like to believe I am ; but for all that, I am isolated, and shall always be so. Mother wouldn’t wish me to be bad ; and I can’t be worldly. Great ladies frighten me : bad women repel me. What a simple life would content me, if I could only live it ! I had a simple life once ; but mother, for my good, took me away from that ; and as far as my soul and my thoughts go, I have now no life at all.

“ And yet I am ungrateful. One treasure I have, though one only—my children. They keep me alive ; they prevent my soul from dying. If there is any revelation at all, my children reveal God to me. Oh, my beloved ones, let me pour out my heart to you ! Let me spend and be spent for you. My little ones, forgive your mother, for I have sometimes been so selfish as this:—I have wished that you might be ill and suffering, that I might wear myself out in tending you.

“ And yet, my little ones, there are solitudes in your mother’s heart which you even cannot fill. She can be your companion, but in some ways you cannot be hers.”

Mrs. Schilizzi, when she finished her reading, with a listless

deliberation took up her pen, and though her hand trembled as she did so, she set herself to resume her writing. She tried to continue her narrative without any formal break ; but having completed a sentence or two she presently scratched them out, and abandoning all attempt at literary form or consistency, she abruptly put down the date, and slowly, but without hesitation, wrote the following few lines, which might have come from the diary of a child—

“I am at Lichtenbourg now. All these papers were written here. I like it very much ; it is a very pretty place, and it suits the children ; but except for them, and a silly, good-looking Austrian, whom I don’t count, I have as usual had not a soul to speak to. That is why I have tried to solace myself with a diary. But this evening, to my astonishment, who should appear but Mr. Grenville ? And he spoke to me very kindly, and seemed glad to see me. I believe he is kind, really. I thought him so when I was here with him before ; only I came afterwards to fancy that he was only laughing at me, or amusing himself by pretending to be kind, and so drawing me out. I felt, when I was under that impression, as if I could have died of shame ; and I was hurt and miserable. But now that impression has passed away, and I am beginning to feel grateful to him. A little kindness—a little real kindness—quite upsets me. Oh, how my head is aching ! If I think more I shall cry, and make a fool of myself. I will kiss my children, and then try to sleep. Irma, darling, darling, I shall have you by my side.”

CHAPTER XIII.

GRENVILLE, who was bent on making his expedition to the castle, and who was anxious to secure Mrs. Schilizzi as his companion, was annoyed, as he dressed next morning, to remember her account of her occupations, and to think that it was many hours before he could hope to see her. Just, however, as he was about to leave the hotel, in order to pay an early visit to the springs, a neat-looking maid tripped after

him with a note, scribbled in pencil, and consisting of the following words—"I am not well, and shall not be busy this morning. If you can do so, will you take me for a walk at eleven?—IRMA SCHILIZZI."

Grenville was delighted, and sent back "Yes" for an answer. Thinking over his late experiences, and contrasting them with his position at present, Lichtenbourg seemed to him the most charming place in the world. He felt as if the spirit of freedom were impregnating the air, and he inhaled it each time he breathed. He was conscious of vigour alike in his mind and limbs; and work and enjoyment shone in an equal sunlight.

At eleven o'clock he and Mrs. Schilizzi met by the glittering kiosk. Close to this was a bed purple with violets; they both stooped for a draught of the pure delightful perfume; and they went off together as if the soul of the spring were in their pulses. As they passed through the town, the entire world looked young. Sunshine basked on all the people they came across, and varnished the wares at the doors of the little shops, where shop-keeping had the air of idle, happy-hearted play.

"Look," said Mrs. Schilizzi, as they passed a villa-garden, "at the bells of the magnolias white in the blue sky!"

Grenville, having looked, stood still for a moment. "You know," he said, "how princes and princesses in fairy-tales are transformed into cats and lions and every kind of shape. It seems to me to-day as if happiness had been transformed into flowers."

His own happiness was such, indeed, that he had gone on walking beside her, without any thought of what direction they were taking; but realizing presently that they had left the town behind them, he said to her, "Where are we going? have you any idea? I've not."

"I am taking you," she said, "to a place I've found out myself. Do you see this river which comes flowing out of the woods and valleys? We are going to turn into the foot-path which skirts ~~it~~ beside the willows."

They left the road, following the course she indicated. Birds sang with the water, and all the foliage whispered. At last they reached a curious timbered mill, with which was united a simple but picturesque restaurant. There was a garden containing arbours, and a large inviting summer-

house. "I often," said Mrs. Schilizzi, "bring my children to tea here. The woman gives them such beautiful cakes and biscuits; and early in the season, she tells me, it is always perfectly quiet. You mustn't think I do nothing but talk to Austrian officers."

They passed through the gate and seated themselves on the green benches of the summer-house. "I'm a little tired," she said. "Will you order a cup of coffee for me? Last night I was restless and hardly slept at all. It would have been nice to have breakfasted here; but I must go back to my children. Ah!" she went on, when the coffee was brought out to her, "how peaceful this place is! Will you tell me, while we rest—for you have not told me yet—what you have seen in Italy, and why you have returned to Lichtenbourg?"

They had attempted during their walk no serious conversation; and the consequence was they were now quietly at their ease with each other.

"Well," answered Grenville, smiling, "as to my return to Lichtenbourg, if you will promise me not to be sceptical, I will tell you what I believe to be the reason. I believe that old castle, whose pictures the Princess showed us, must have mesmerized and brought me back here; for I am determined to go and see it. It is only ten miles away. You think I am laughing at you; I see that in your face. But I am not: only—"

"Only what?"

"The question you asked me sounded a very simple one, but to answer it truly, do you know what I should have to inflict on you? A long discourse on the philosophy of life generally—especially upon prose and poetry, and the types of life that correspond to them."

"Go on," she said, starting with surprise and pleasure. "This is what I like listening to."

He hesitated a little as if doubtful how to express himself. "You know," he began, "how all our modern philosophers denounce as useless the life of the contemplative monastic orders. Virtue, they say, is utility, not private perfection. But to Christian critics, at all events, the monks and nuns have an answer. Different people have different works in the world. Theirs is to realize completely certain spiritual possibilities, which every Christian, it is assumed, should try to realize partially. Well—what saints are to men as Christian

beings, poets are to men as human beings. The highest use of the practical man is to improve the environment of life ; the use of the poet is to develop the spiritual organism, or to be an example of its development. Do you see my meaning ?”

“Yes,” she said eagerly ; “of course I do.”

“I talk of poets,” he continued ; “but you understand, of course, that I don’t mean merely people who write verses. I mean people generally, whose chief desire and necessity is to live the life of which poetry is the literary expression ; for poetry is merely the body, of which those who appreciate it are the soul. I don’t want to be sentimental ; but I think I may say this : few people can write good love-poems ; but whoever loves deeply lives one.”

“Go on,” she murmured ; “your words are like carrier-pigeons. My feelings have wings, but my words can hardly flutter.”

He hesitated, and then said—

“I am urging all this, as you will see presently, in order to shield myself from my own self-criticism. I want to show to you, and to myself too, that the emotional or poetic life has, on practical grounds, as good a claim to be cultivated and respected as the practical life. I am not thinking specially of love, though I took that as an example, but of every kind of feeling that fills the heart with music, or lifts it with aspiration. Just take a type or two of the two kinds of life. Take Shelley, or Goethe, or Horace, or Sir Walter Scott—and then take Napoleon, or the Duke of Wellington, or James Watt. Compared with a campaign, or a revolution, or the introduction of steam-power, what a trifling thing a poem seems—a butterfly as compared to a locomotive. And yet all that gives meaning to such things as these—to the hurrying train or steamer, or miles of military pageant—to courage, or to triumph, or to industry—is, the jewels that the poets brighten. Poetry—let me go on ; let me tell you how I define poetry—it is the emotional expression of a sense of life’s value. I don’t mean that a poem need be all sentiment. Poems like ‘Faust’ and ‘Hamlet’ may be full of the profoundest thought ; but thought in poetry is always thought which is in direct connection with emotion ; and that emotion, whatever it may be, depends upon some belief in the value and the beauty of life. Well, such being the case, I put the matter in this way. Poetry is adoration secularized ; and the poetic life, or, if you

like to call it so, the romantic life, is the monastic life secularized. You may say that this life is useless, and in one sense so it is. But it has the same sort of use which the life has which aims at complete sanctity. It embodies and pursues an ideal just as truly as the life of any community vowed to perpetual adoration. What are you listening to? The clock? Yes—it is striking twelve.”

“We must go,” she said. “My children breakfast in half an hour. Don’t stop what you were saying. Finish it as we walk back.”

“A love-match,” he resumed, as soon as they were on their way—“we have both of us sense enough to talk about these things rationally—I mean a marriage which has nothing but love to recommend it, is an attempt at the poetic life, even if not always an attainment of it. Most people—and in most cases they are right—think such a marriage ridiculous. The reason is that the lovers have rarely a true vocation. You see,” he went on, jerking a stone into the river, and speaking in a matter-of-fact voice as if he were reading an advertisement, “the need for this kind of life varies in intensity in different natures. But I believe, though I have never been fortunate enough to prove the belief by experience, that for some people who find affection, and who leave for its sake houses and lands and ambition, the heavens are opened as truly as they were for Stephen.”

They were both silent for a time, not from any sense of embarrassment, but merely because respectively they were following out their own thoughts. At last she said gently, “But Stephen’s vision was a dream.”

“Yes,” exclaimed Grenville, losing the reserve of his manner; “and what higher end could there be for all practical activity, for all public careers, for all social reforms, than to make beds for all of us, on which to dream dreams like these?”

Again there was silence, which presently he interrupted with a laugh. She looked at him narrowly, and asked him what amused him.

“Merely to think,” he said, “how far I must seem to have strayed from the question you asked me—why I came back to Lichtenbourg? However, what we have just been saying will help me to tell you why. I have no true vocation for the higher, for the ideal life, whether poetic or religious. My lot is cast amongst the secular and prosaic plough-lands, where

ambition sows and reaps. But I once was allured by the other life; and at times it allures me still, and I long to escape to that happy world of the imagination where those for whom poetry has no direct message can hear its echoes in the lives of others, and of other ages. The world of the imagination I find now in this country. It represents poetry to me. It liberates me from the prison of my circumstances. Italy last week represented prose—and there you have the reason why I have ever come back here. I am, in fact, like a school-boy who has run home from school. Do you understand all this nonsense?"

"Yes," she said, "yes. I didn't answer you, for I was thinking about it. Of course," she went on, "people must act and work. Goethe, indeed, said that action is the cure of doubt; but to me—well, to me it seems the cure of aspiration also. I speak only for myself. Personally, I want not to act, but to be. That is the reason of my interest in what you said about saints and poets. But I don't, in one point, quite agree with you. Poetry, the sense of beauty, and the aspiration for something beyond, which comes from the sense of beauty as the scent comes from a flower—you say that this is religion secularized; I should be content to say simply that it is religion. And I should wish, if I knew how, to lead the religious life. I sometimes think that it is wicked to feel like this—that it is wishing to be selfish and useless; but what you have said reassures me a little. Besides, when a woman—when a woman says she wishes not to act, but to be, her real wish, I suppose, is to be something for the sake of somebody else. Take me, for instance. I wish it principally for the sake of my children. My children are my religion, or at least the practical part of it. The next religious service will be their breakfast or luncheon. Will you assist at it? If you will, you will be very welcome; and you will see what I think is the real triumph of management—that I have got the *chef* to make me a genuine child's rice-pudding."

He was not only pleased but touched by this homely invitation. As he entered the salon with her, where the cloth was already spread, she said to him—

"I am sure you must think me very stupid; and I know I am so: only with you I seem more stupid even than I am. You keep me silent by giving me so much to think of."

Had she made such a speech to him when first he began to

know her, he would have certainly tried to respond to it with some species of compliment; but in presence of her complete simplicity compliments seemed out of place, and almost cruel; and his only answer was, "No, you are not stupid."

The children rushed to their mother, bright as if her coming were sunlight; and then turning to Grenville, whom they recognized as an old friend, they gave him a share of the smiles which their mother had called into existence. A sense of partnership with her subtly stole into his heart, and spread its enchantment over the whole simple meal. This was deepened from time to time by the gentle, unconscious way in which she asked him to do this and that for the children, as if he were a friend whom she might call on for all assistance; and through the happy sounds of the present, echoes of their morning's conversation made a vibrating music, and the ripple of the river sang to him.

The children had a passion for flowers, and asked Grenville, who told them that he had seen quantities in the meadows, why he had not brought them some.

"Suppose," he said to their mother, "that we have tea at the mill. They can, as we go, pick flowers to their hearts' content."

The children were delighted at the proposal; and the mother's eyes had assented even before her lips did.

"Let us go at five," she said. "Till then it is too hot."

"In that case," he answered, "hot as it is, I will fill up the time between by a visit to Count T—. I have an introduction to him, and I hear he has just arrived; and no doubt he will tell us something about the country."

The Count's castle, perched on its wooded eminence, could be reached on foot by a climb of half an hour. Grenville's visit was in every way satisfactory; and when he rejoined his friends and went off to the mill with them, he was full of accounts of what he had heard and seen. "The castle," he said, "of which the Princess told us, can be reached from here easily; and the Count assures me it is the most curious place in the country. He was particularly anxious also that I should go to a place of his own—an hotel which he has built in the heart of one of his forests, near a lake and a mineral spring, and which is going to be opened presently. He has a hunting-lodge close by, which, if I cared for fishing, he said would be at my disposal for as long as I chose to occupy it. Suppose

one day we accept this handsome offer, so far as to drive over there, and use the lodge for a picnic."

They were sitting in the summer-house, the scene of their morning's talk, hearing the mill-wheel turn with its plunging murmur, and watching the children as they went to and fro like butterflies. Presently at the gate of the garden appeared an itinerant flute-player, who began some simple melody, the notes of which were sweet as a thrush's. The children dropped their flowers, and ran off to listen to him. Mrs. Schilizzi, pleased with the scene before her, seemed pleased still farther at the idea of the proposed expedition. Seeing this, Grenville continued, "I have something else to propose besides. The castle we were speaking of belongs to a Baron K——, who has two rooms in it, which he occupies for a week sometimes; and he is, the Count tells me, expected there in a day or two. While he is in residence, the castle is closed to strangers. So what do you say? Do you think you would have the energy to take time by the forelock, and go there with me to-morrow?"

"Listen to the flute," she said. "To-day has been full of music. To go to the castle would make to-morrow full of it also. Find out about getting there, and this evening I will tell you if I can manage it."

He met her at the band, after dinner. They stayed there for a short time only. The scene struck both of them as artificial, after their late experiences; but he sat with her long enough to convince her that the expedition was an easy one, and when he said good-night to her she had agreed to undertake it with him. It was too long for the children, so she stipulated for a late start, which would leave them their mother's company for nearly all the morning. An hour's drive, and half an hour in the train, brought them to a station almost at the foot of the castle. It was a station which stood amongst flat fields and furrows, and all around were hills covered with forest. Here and there some peasant women were working; the roads were nothing but primitive unfenced tracks; silence and sunshine slept on the whole country. And straight before them, rising from the quiet levels, was a spire of rock, covered with wood, and gleaming with roofs and turrets.

Mrs. Schilizzi stood still, contemplating it.

"It is like a stage," she exclaimed, "ready for some

mediaeval drama. Since you began to talk to me, my imagination is always working. This is literally a country of romance."

Near as the castle was—they seemed indeed to be almost under it—they had before them harder work than they bargained for. The beginning of the ascent was up some grassy slopes, which brought them at last to a grove of ragged pine-trees; and here, gray amongst the foliage, they discovered a moss-grown tower. Passing through this by a gateway, they found themselves on a rising road, with a battlemented wall on the outer side, and impending precipices on the inner; and it wound upwards round the rock like a corkscrew. At every fifty yards they came to a fresh tower, with an iron door and a mouldering coat-of-arms, and now and then to a gap spanned by a creaking drawbridge. The ascent was so steep and long, and the whole scene was so singular, that they often paused, at once to rest and to think. Down below them were the fields at an increasing depth, up in the air were the walls and gables of the castle. Even Fritz, who had accompanied them, was overcome with the spectacle, and said to his master—

"Sir, if these trees could talk, what strange things they would tell!"

As for Grenville and Mrs. Schilizzi, they hardly spoke at all. He at first had made one or two observations; but she presently said—

"Don't talk. I feel as if I were in a cathedral."

They were conscious, however, of thinking the same thoughts; and by and by, seeing that she was growing tired, he had merely to look at her, and without thanks or apology she took his arm, and silently leaned her weight on it.

Thus they reached the summit. Under some archways hung a smell of wood-smoke; and here and there a few cocks and hens were straying. These were the first signs of life they had come across; and Fritz was sent to see if he could find the custodian. Grenville and his companion found themselves meanwhile in an irregular courtyard, filled with old copper water-tanks, and surrounded by a medley of doors, arcades, and windows. One of the doors was open. Mrs. Schilizzi looked in, and discovered a miniature chapel, hanging on the very edge of the precipice. There was a book on the altar, some candlesticks, and some fragments of gold lace; and some fixed worm-eaten seats, which would have held

perhaps twenty worshippers. The air seemed full to her of the prayers of dead generations, and suddenly she realized that in the seat nearest the altar was a kneeling figure, habited in full armour, with its gauntleted hands clasped, and stretched towards the crucifix. She felt instinctively, what she afterwards discovered was the truth, that for hundreds of years this figure had remained there kneeling. Moved and awed, she hardly could tell why, she herself too sank on her knees, and half outstretched her hands in a similar rapt attitude. In a few minutes' time she rejoined Grenville outside. He saw that she wished to speak, but was afraid of her own voice. She found it at last, and taking hold of one of the buttons of his coat, she said—

"Do you remember, at the foot of the hill we passed a poor woman, who was sitting with a sick baby? I want to go down, and see if we can't help her. I want to help some one—I want to do something good. Do you think me off my head? What is happening to me? I hardly know myself."

He saw her swallow some strong access of agitation. He saw the effort undulate in her throat.

"Wait," he said, "for a moment. Here is Fritz with the custodian. Fritz, at the foot of the castle was a poor woman with a baby. Give her a florin; ask if she wants help; and tell her the lady will presently come and speak to her."

"She is here," said Fritz. "She is the custodian's wife. I think they are only tired. It is a long way to get up here."

The woman was entering the court at the very moment. Mrs. Schilizzi almost ran towards her; but moving gently as soon as she got near, spoke to her in a voice so kindly, that the woman looked up in wonder. Grenville saw her presently take the child in her arms, and carrying it, go with the mother through some low shadowy archway. The rose of her face presently came back again into the daylight.

"I know," she said, "what it is that the child wants. I have told the woman it shall be sent to-morrow to her from Lichtenbourg."

They now proceeded to follow the custodian through the building. The rooms they entered were full of dust and echoes. They were bare of all furniture except a few dilapidated tables, and a multitude of rude portraits hanging on the whitewashed walls. But in place of furniture, in one room after another, were piles of rusty armour, heaped up

like hay-stacks. They saw the quarters which the Baron was shortly to occupy, once the priest's, and almost as bare as the others. Saints and scenes from the Bible, half obliterated by time, were daubed on the rough plaster; and if it had not been for some china pipes on racks, and some pairs of Hessian boots, they would still have seemed the abode of some ascetic of the Middle Ages. By and by the sight-seers found themselves in the open air again. They were on a narrow platform, hanging over the precipice; and all about them were loop-holed turrets and batteries, clinging to the rock like swallows' nests, and connected by scrambling stairs. The hush came over them which is caused by the spectacle of a great depth. Presently they saw at one side of them a little triangular garden, supported on a ledge by parapets, and reached by some rough steps. There were a few bushes in it, and a bench on which they seated themselves. Looking towards the custodian they noticed that his head was bare. A second glance showed them he was standing under a wooden crucifix. There was in his face a manliness mixed with melancholy, and a hardy devout patience, that seemed strangely in keeping with the gaunt sacred image, embrowned by a thousand storms. They called him to them, and talked to him. He was grateful for their interest in his child, and showed a simple pleasure in telling them of his monotonous life. Once each week either he or his wife descended to the world below to purchase their scant necessities; otherwise, they lived alone in this aerial solitude. Once a year a priest said mass in the chapel; once a year the Baron came for a day or two; and now and then some sight-seers. His life was varied by no incidents but these. They asked him to look for Fritz, and tell him to go on to the station and see that their dinner was ready for them, which they had ordered at the small restaurant.

The man went and left them alone together.

"You mustn't," she said presently, "take me to any more places like this."

"Why not?" he asked.

"I can't tell why it is," she said, "but they overwhelm me. If one's soul, if one's imagination, has a heart, as one's body has, they make mine throb and beat so that I can hardly live." She turned her eyes to him, sad like an evening sky. "I have lived," she said, "so seldom, or rather not at all. I am not accustomed to it." Presently she went on: "I don't

know why I feel like this ; but it's you, I think, who have set my imagination going. This is literally a country of romance. You are right about it. I feel it all as you do. It makes all the fetters of reality melt into dreams, and become unreal, and leave one free. I am a child again : all my life is before me. Oh, to live ! To be oneself, as one had hoped to be !”

He heard her murmur to herself something that had the sound of verse. He asked her what she said.

“Nothing,” she replied. “Or it is *à propos* of nothing. It was some lines, I think, translated from the second part of Faust—

‘Here the unspeakable
Grows to fulfilment.’

I don't know why I said them. Here in this high silence the past seems face to face with one. Or is it the past ? I can't tell what it is. Look at the sunset. That too seems to be part of it.”

“It is,” said Grenville, “what yesterday I called poetry. I see you understand quite as well as I do—better even. I only stand on tip-toe ; you float on the air.”

“I wonder,” she murmured, “if we have any right to float. Perhaps we were made only to walk—to plod.”

“That,” said Grenville, “is a question we must each answer for ourselves. What is folly in most people is elevation in some. Fancy St. Francis promoting a company ; or a stock-broker in an ecstasy, like St. Francis ! You know,” he went on presently, “that space has three dimensions. So has life ; and as led by different people, it may consist of different movements—of lateral movements, like those of a cart-horse ; or of a movement upwards. The movement upwards is the movement of saints, and poets, and yourself. The reason is that they and that you have wings. I have long lost mine. They fell from me with my boy's curls : and yet when you talk I feel the fanning of yours.”

She rose from her seat, and looked down at him with a smile that had something of amusement in it.

“Do you know what you do ?” she said. “It is something that you shouldn't. Instead of saying what is true about yourself, you are saying what is the exact opposite. Look at your watch, will you ; for I think, to judge by the light, that

instead of a movement upwards, we ought to begin one downwards."

As they went together descending the winding road, unnoticed by him she often turned and looked at him, with the curious intentness of a child.

Suddenly she said, laughing, "Had you curls when you were a little boy?"

He laughed too, and again admitted that he had.

"When you were a little boy," she asked, "what name did they call you?"

He told her it was "Bobby."

She repeated the word softly. "That," she said, "was my brother's name." She looked him in the face for a moment, and once more repeated, "Bobby."

"And you," he said, "when you were a little girl, I know what they called you; for your name no one would alter. It was Irma—Miss Irma—little Irma. Did not they call you that? I wrote a poem once to a person of that name. I did indeed—and not very long ago."

She stopped short, and looked at him, reddening with a painful flush.—He went on rapidly—"It was to a very small person. It was to Irma, your little daughter."

She caught her breath sharply, as if with sudden relief; then he saw the shadows of her throat tremble. She gasped, "You must tell me the verses—not now—but some day." And her eyes before she could avert them had filled suddenly with tears.

CHAPTER XIV.

THAT evening before she went to bed, inspired by the events of the day, she produced the sheets of her diary; and having given her children's eyelids the gentle benediction of her kiss, she leaned her head on her hand, and began writing as follows—

"Am I sad or happy? I don't know. I never felt as I feel now, before. I am quite bewildered. I wish I was a child again, and had mother to guide me. And yet, why?

What is there to make a fuss about? Only a very pleasant thing has happened to me; which, though to me it is surprising, is surely in itself very commonplace; but I find it quite new. How baldly and badly I put things: what has happened is this. I have met a man who cares to talk to me because he understands my thoughts. He likes me for what is human in me, not for what is animal; and he does not look at me with the eyes of a cowardly beast of prey. At first, indeed, he did not care to look at me at all, but even that is better than the ways of other men: though I confess that there have been times—months, I think—perhaps one whole year, when I allowed my vanity to be flattered by those men's admiration. I thought any sort of attention was better than none, then. Again—as to this man, I thought at first that he laughed at me. Perhaps he did. Socially I knew he thought nothing of me; and I'm sure he thinks nothing now. But of that I am glad; for somehow it makes the change in him seem deeper and more sincere. He is sincere, I am sure; for only once—and then it seemed forced and unnatural—has he paid me a single compliment, except that one compliment of understanding me.

"To be understood! The sensation is so strange to me that it makes me a new creature. My mind, my tastes, my feelings have all become new things. Bobby—I mean dear Bobby, my sailor brother—once described to me his delight when in some strange place in the East he heard the sound of his own language. For the first time in my life I have heard some one else talk mine. Mr. Grenville does more. He not only talks my language, but enlarges it for me. In addition to saying what I have often myself said before, he says other things I have only tried to say; and again others which I have never even thought of, but which become mine the moment he has said them. He seems to have liberated in me a host of thoughts that were in prison. He is the fairy prince who has entered the sleeping palace.

"What have I written? Perhaps I shouldn't have written that: and yet I am reassured, so far as regards him, by seeing that I have written it so naturally. It is a witness to the fact that he has never tried to make love to me. He might easily have tried to do so, and so have destroyed everything. But I noticed this, that whenever matters of sentiment were talked about, everything personal or even emotional was

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carefully banished from his manner ; and he contrived to give me the same unembarrassed feeling I might have had if we were talking politics :—no, much more unembarrassed than that ; for I couldn't talk politics if I tried.

“ And yet for certain reasons this is making me feel fearful and anxious. To be understood in this way spoils me. It is taking me away from the hard benches and starved table of a school to which I must soon go back, and is showing me what life might be—a thing I had best forget. His understanding has made mine, which was once so barren, become green like fields in spring. I feel as if I were floating—as if I were being taken off my feet. He—no, not he—I didn't mean that—I mean the fact that he has understood me, makes my thoughts rise like a kite rising on the wind.”

Her next day's record was this—

“ We are going to-morrow to see Count T——'s hotel in the forest. Every sunrise now brings with it something to hope for. Mr. Grenville came in after the children's dinner to arrange how we should go. I am happy ; for an accident occurred which confirms me in all I thought about him ; and yet, as for me, if I think of myself merely, I ought, I suppose, to blush at it. Indeed it touches myself so closely that I hardly know how to write it ; and yet, apart from me, it was so simple. What occurred was this.

“ The waiter, in laying the table, had moved some of my books—a pile of them—and had put them on a chair near the window. Many of them were English poets. Mr. Grenville took some of them up, and said something about the library with which I travelled. I thought of telling him—but I had not the courage to do so—that I was making some notes on the different moods and ways in which English poets had approached and treated Nature.

“ ‘ I see,’ he said, ‘ you have underlined a great deal of Wordsworth.’

“ And all of a sudden, under Wordsworth, he came on a heap of horrible French novels. I never had meant to bring them ; I thought they were burnt : but some had been left, and Julie packed them up by mistake. I call them horrible ; but as I said before, they were classics. They were not books it need necessarily be a disgrace to read. But the moment he noticed them, I saw him give a look at me, and his tone changed and grew cold.

"Your tastes are certainly catholic,' he said, as he took one of them up.

"They are not,' I exclaimed, 'if you mean I've a taste for those. They were packed by mistake. They've no business to be here. They were given me. I meant to have burnt them. I wish you would put them into the fire for me.' I don't know how I said all this; but he saw I was sincere at all events; for he looked relieved, and his old manner came back to him. But I still felt shy and awkward, and hurried on to explain myself. I observed what a pity it was that books of so much genius should have so much in them one regretted having even looked at. 'One is always being told,' I went on, 'that they are justified by the fact of their being true: and perhaps they are true—I can't tell about that; but on me the impression which they leave, is not that they are true, but that they are bad.'

"Now I am perfectly certain, though I cannot tell how I became so—I am certain that he thought these books bad, dangerous—how shall I put it?—for me personally. And he was right—there is evil in every one of us. But without dropping the subject, which might have put me to shame so easily, he gave our discussion a turn which completely separated it from myself.

"I am exactly like you,' he said, 'in the way I regard the matter. Like you, I recognize that these books have genius, and that, compared with novels expressly written for the school-room, they have truth; but I have the same sense which you have, that for some people they are bad. For people like ourselves, however, their offensive quality is, I believe, their artistic badness, far more than their moral badness. Oddly enough, in the train, when I came from Paris to Vienna, I was talking to a man—by the way, he is the doctor here—about this very subject; and he helped me to see the matter clearly. I believe that in novels written for grown-up people all sides of life should be treated with equal fairness; but the human imagination is so constituted, that six lines written about certain things will impress us as distinctly as six pages written about others. The French school we are talking of wholly forget this, and although they may not give more words to man's lower nature than to his higher, they produce on the mind of the reader a far more vivid impression of it. There is the artistic badness. The

moral badness is this—that the impression thus produced is not only disproportionate, but it tends to corrupt the judgment long before it has appealed to it.’

“How true this is! I myself feel its truth so keenly, that I could hardly have thought it possible to discuss it without embarrassment. But it was Mr. Grenville’s whole manner, as well as his actual phrases, which made everything easy, and surrounded one with a cleanly atmosphere. I was more grateful to him than I can say for his chivalrous delicacy towards myself. Could any brother be kinder—or so kind?

“He took the books with him. May I never see them again—them, or any like them.

“I was just preparing to put my papers away, when—shall I really put it down, the little silly thing that has happened? On the table at which I write stands a small looking-glass in a Dresden china frame. Quite by accident I have seen my face in it; and I have seen, and said to myself, that I do—well, that I do look charming. Mr. Grenville, I believe, doesn’t think me a bit pretty. Most men have thought nothing else about me. I’m glad Mr. Grenville is as he is. I like him to see in me the good points I am in doubt about, not those about which I can’t help being certain. And yet, being a woman, I should like him to see my prettiness, just as a fact of nature. Shall I ask him if he does so? Stop! what am I writing? How vain—how vain! I ought to be above such thoughts. I have forgotten them.

“To-morrow—let me think of that—we are going into the heart of the forest. These expeditions to me are like her first balls to a girl. Everything now is so unaccountably, so unfathomably fresh to me.”

Before composing herself to sleep she knelt up in her bed, her hands crossed on the folds of her white drapery. She did not, even mentally, say any definite word, for the influences to which, as she grew up, her religion had been subjected, hardly admitted of this; but she let her soul open itself to something beyond her and above her, as she rested for some moments in the attitude of an infant Samuel. When she closed her eyes now there was no frown on her forehead, but a placid faith in the day towards which sleep would waft her.

Faith in this case was certainly not disappointed. A light varnished carriage, whose brownness shone in the morning, adapted for rough roads, and drawn by four active little

horses, who jingled bells as they moved and tossed red tassels, took them away with a speed that was in itself exhilaration. Out of the town they sped, through valleys and fields and orchards. Then came ground that was wilder, plantations of pine, and spaces covered with pine-needles. Rocks cropped up through the soil, and prickly bushes dotted it. At last they entered a great undulating forest, where the branches whispered and the breath of the pine-trees floated. Through this they drove for a good two hours at least, encountering all the way hardly a sign of life, except some men who, in one place, were busy mending the road, and a waggon which they overtook, laden with chairs and tables, and which, as they surmised, must be bound for the Count's hotel.

They had arranged to picnic in the hunting-lodge, and go to the hotel from thence. A rising slope, covered with heath and bog-myrtle, at last appeared, like an island in the sea of foliage. Driving up this, and passing through a belt of trees, they saw the lodge before them—a whitewashed building, with a high-pitched tiled roof, and an open arcade by which the few rooms were connected. Fritz soon produced the forester and his wife, who took charge of it; and having made them aware who his master was, it was hardly a minute before the principal doors were open, and their hamper of provisions was being carried into the principal sitting-room.

Mrs. Schilizzi was in the happiest mood possible, and Grenville had caught it from her, in all its buoyant freshness. They insisted on being left to unpack their hamper for themselves; and she exclaimed with delight at the various delicacies contained in it, taxing him, as if he were a boy, with being wrong and extravagant in having ordered them. Every package opened had all the savour of a discovery; every missing requisite, which they asked the old woman to supply, was the occasion of an adventure. Grenville ran her to earth in her own kitchen regions, and came back with stories of her pots and pans and her cooking-stove, and she presently followed him in with a pile of thick white plates, and with some old Bohemian glasses having coats-of-arms in colour on them. Whilst she was arranging them, eager to do her utmost, Grenville and Mrs. Schilizzi took stock of the room—its bare polished floor, its velvet chairs and sofas, stiffly grouped together at one end round a table; they peeped into a writing-room, and a charming bed-room beyond;

they examined some pieces of tapestry and a large number of horns, which formed the only decorations of the rudely distempered walls; and at last they went to the windows. They turned to each other with looks and expressions of admiration, for straight before them, at a distance of a hundred feet or so, was the smooth glass of a lake, full of the sky and pine-woods, which stretched itself out to a breadth of fully a mile, and reached away curving into some indefinite distance.

Charmed by this unexpected prospect, they now turned to their meal, which was happy like a meal of children. Its microscopic incidents were sufficient to fill the moment—the pouring out of the wine, the cutting up of the chicken, the extracting the salt from the paper packets that held it. They experienced together the most charming form of confidence—the unaccustomed sharing in the enjoyment of little things such as these. No thought seemed too small to communicate, no sense of amusement too trifling to share. Then they went out to inspect the landscape in the neighbourhood, having first asked the way to the Count's hotel. The way, they presently found, hardly required asking; for the building was full in sight, at about a furlong's distance. It stood near to the lake, and was somewhat Swiss in appearance, surrounded with wooden balconies, and shaded by projecting roofs. They entered. It was full of a smell of newly-planed wood and varnish. Though it was not yet open, the furnishing was nearly complete, and the manager was beside himself with delight at showing his accommodation to the strangers. Some private suites were fit for immediate occupation; everything was ready but the fittings for the public rooms. "The air," said the manager, "owing to the nearness of the pine-trees, is supposed to be healthier even than that of Lichtenbourg, and the neighbouring mineral spring has properties quite unique. Will not your excellencies honour me by taking coffee?"

They told him that the woman at the lodge was at that moment preparing some, and they slowly strolled back enchanted with all about them. There were grassy slopes, tufted with aromatic shrubs; there were glimpses of cart-tracks leading away into the forest; there were reeds by the lake-side up to their waists in water; and a beech-tree in front of the lodge made a shade on the warm soil. Here they

had their coffee; their tray rested on the beech-husks, and they themselves lay on some rugs beside it. During luncheon everything reminded her of incidents in her childhood, of picnics with her brothers and sisters, and of absurd shifts they were put to. She told him how Dick stole her pocket-handkerchief for a napkin, and how Olga used to say, "Do look at Irma gobbling." And Grenville had thought, though he forbore to tell her so, that he saw that submerged childhood shining still mischievous in her eyes. Now, however, her mood had become more pensive. She talked not of the amusements of her childhood, but of its charms and dreams. "There were reeds like those," she said, "in a lake that was near our home. I used often to sit by them and wonder how Pan could have made his pipes." Then gradually one thing after another recalled to her her father's garden, its tall trees and its flower-beds. Each memory as it floated into her mind shaped itself into artless words; and occasionally she would call Grenville's attention to something in the scene before her—some ripple of sunlight on the lake, or the ruddy or silvery bark of some gleaming tree, which appealed to her for its own sake only.

This extraordinary quality in her of sensitiveness to natural beauty, struck Grenville afresh; and as they were driving back he at last gave his thoughts utterance.

"I have been wondering," he said, "since the mere colouring of scenes like these appeals so strongly to your sense of beauty and your imagination, how you would be affected by such a country as Italy."

"Ah," she exclaimed, "if I could only see it!"

"All sorts of scenes, and objects, and aspects of things," he went on, "are floating into my mind at this moment, the beauty of which would, I am sure, make you hold your breath."

"Tell me," she said. "What sort of things?"

He answered her slowly, as if he were talking to himself, and enumerating chance memories.

"The marble peaks," he began, "of the pure Carrara mountains, rising out of violet mist, and glittering in a sky of primrose-colour; the crescent of turquoise waves, which one sees framed by the ilexes under whose shadow Shelley wrote *The Cenci*; sands white like an arum-lily I have walked by in the hush of the morning, whilst the dark blue waters slept on

them ; boats gliding on Lake Como, with sails like the breasts of swans—I should like to be with you when you were looking at things like these—when you were hearing the songs of the peasants floating at dusk amongst the fire-flies, or the notes of the angelus vibrate, some near, some distant, from half a dozen craggy villages amongst the Apennines.”

“That is enough,” she said. “Let me think a little of that. Every word is a picture ; I wish we could see it all.” Then suddenly she turned to him, and, looking at him with a smile of curiosity, “But you told me,” she said, “that Italy was a place that represented prose to you.”

She heard him sigh faintly, and for a moment he did not speak. “I remember,” he said at last ; “but that was only on a special occasion ; and it was due to—how shall we put it ?—to extraneous, or (shall we say ?) adventitious, circumstances.”

“What grand words !” she laughed. “I wonder what the circumstances were.”

“I am not sure whether, supposing you care to hear, I may not one day tell you. If ever I do, you will know something about me which at the present moment I hardly know myself.”

When they reached Lichtenbourg it was latish. She was tired, and dined in her room. Grenville said to himself, amongst the clatter of plates in the restaurant, “It seems as if a brook had been rippling at my side all day, and the god Pan or somebody had filled all the reeds with music.” As for the clatter of the plates and the music of the band outside, loud as they both were, he was hardly conscious of either.

She, for her part, was indeed thoroughly tired. Before she went to bed, her glance fell on her diary. She laid her hand on it, and pushed it away wearily ; but then with a change of purpose she opened it, seized a pen, and hastily wrote on the page the following verse from Tennyson, with blots above and below it, meant to do duty for asterisks—

“Across the hills and far away,
Beyond their utmost purple rim,
And deep into the dying day,
The happy princess followed him.”

CHAPTER XV.

THEY had made no plans for the following day, but he took it for granted that he should spend it with her somewhere and somehow ; and he was pleased rather than surprised when, before ten o'clock, a note was brought to him from her, begging him to come to her instantly. Surprise, however, came as soon as he found himself in her presence ; for her face and manner were full of trouble and agitation. "I have just," she said, "heard such awful news ; and I can't at all tell what's the best thing to be done. The doctor has just told me that scarlatina has broken out in Lichtenbourg—that three children have already died of it, and that there are two bad cases in the villa next the hotel. I want," she went on, "to be off without a moment's unnecessary delay ; but I am so perplexed—I can't decide where to go. I might return to my aunt ; but the children are never well at the castle : and of course we have our flat at Vienna ; but Vienna, in this heat, would be death to them. Poor little things—they are both of them so delicate ! And then," she added with a faint, regretful laugh, "everything here was beginning to be so pleasant. Do help me—tell me what you advise."

Grenville's face, whilst she was speaking, had shown as much concern as her own ; but by the time she had ended, its expression had changed suddenly, and he looked at her for a moment in silence, with a dawning smile.

"Can't you help me?" she said, a little irritably. "To me this is really serious. I, whatever you may do, see in it nothing to smile at."

"I was smiling," he said, "at something you don't see ; and that is a way, and an easy one, out of all your difficulties. Take your children to the Count's hotel in the forest."

The suggestion came to her like a burst of sunshine out of clouds. She drew her breath and clasped her hands with delight at it. But then, relapsing into despondency, she sighed, "The hotel's not open."

"No," urged Grenville, "but some of the rooms are ready ; and we know the cook's there. No doubt they could take you in. If you will let me, I'll order a horse, ride over, and

arrange about it ; and whilst Fritz goes to the stables I'll see the doctor, whom I know. I'll tell him our plan, and send him back to you, in order that he may give you his opinion on it."

She paused reflecting ; then she looked at him inquiringly. "And what would you do?" she said. "Would you stay here? You couldn't—at least I suppose so—come very well to the hotel."

"I," he said, "would go to the Count's hunting-lodge. As I told you the other day, it is already as good as lent to me."

"It's too kind of you," she murmured. "But how bored you would be shut up there!"

"As soon as I am," he answered, "I promise you I will go away. Only tell me—shall I ride over now and arrange things?"

"Yes ; do what you can ; and I shall be waiting for your report anxiously. Don't be too long—not longer than you can help."

This parting injunction kept softly echoing in his ears, as his horse's hoofs rang on the road of yesterday ; and he was back again, his mission accomplished, before she had begun expecting him. The manager, he said, had been charmed at his prompt return, and more charmed still at finding out the reason of it. A suite of rooms with a lovely view of the lake were perfectly ready at this moment for occupation ; and though as yet there were only a few servants, there were still sufficient to wait upon one family. As for himself, Grenville had been at the lodge. The forester and his wife had heard from the Count that morning, that the English Excellency was to occupy it whenever it pleased him ; and "By this time," he said, "they will be airing the sheets and dusting. If we go to-morrow afternoon we shall find everything prepared for us ; and in case at the hotel there should be difficulty the first night about dinner, I have ordered something at six, for ourselves and for the children, at the lodge."

"I see," she said, laughing, "you will have everything your own way ; and as the doctor has been here, and considers your plan excellent, we are all bound to be grateful to you. You must also arrange about the carriages. Our flight will be a regular exodus."

And indeed with the luggage, and the servants, and the

children, it appeared so. It was a journey slower than their first, and so far as scenery went, it could not offer them the excitement and charm of novelty; but they felt in it a novelty of some kind—they hardly could tell what; and though the place to which it was taking them was still fresh in their memories, the life to which it was taking them had something in it that was hardly imaginable.

Columbus, when he landed first in the New World, could not have felt the thrill of entire strangeness more keenly than they did, when they finally reached their destination. The halt of the three carriages at the wooden porch of the hotel, the bustle of the servants, the sorting of the luggage, the taking of hers indoors, and the despatch of his to the lodge, were for them like events that never had had a parallel. They inspected her rooms together, and admired their fresh daintiness; they went out on the balcony, and admired the lake and forest. The children were wild with delight, as if they had never before been happy; and the mother clapped her hands and laughed as happily as the children.

Presently Grenville hurried off to the lodge, promising to return and bring them over to dinner. The gold of the warm evening was floating on the lake and melting in it, when he did so an hour later, and they went with him across the grass and the pine-needles—a bright exotic group; for the children wore their red frocks, and their mother, who apologized for her appearance, was glittering in the cloak which had startled his eyes at Lichtenbourg. The meal which they found awaiting them was a supper rather than dinner. There was fish from the lake, a chicken, and a variety of early vegetables. There was for the elders a slim bottle of hock, and an old German jug full of milk for the children. The mellow daylight was still bright enough for them to eat by; but some candles were burning, whose flames were like pale daffodils.

"When we were little," Mrs. Schilizzi said, "we had a game which we called 'pretending.' One could play it in many ways; but our favourite way was this. We put a tent we had on the back of an old donkey, and we walked away to a common behind the house. We pitched our tent, we encamped amongst the furze-bushes, we lit a fire, and pretended we were Arabs in the desert. Those encampments have always seemed to me the remotest places in the world, and the hours we spent there the most adventurous life imaginable,

I feel somehow as if we were playing at 'pretending' now." She said this when the meal was drawing to a close; and then she added presently, laughing into her children's eyes, "Now, children, there is another adventure in store for you. You must come back with mother a long, long way to bed, all across the grass and through the myrtle-bushes where the beautiful fairies play."

The children opened their eyes, and they were deep with the joys of imagination.

"Must we go yet?" said Grenville. "Won't you wait for our coffee?"

"No," she answered, laying her hand on his arm. "They are tired; it is very late for them. Get them their hats, and let us go. We will come back for our coffee."

As they went, in the dusk, the children played amongst the bushes, constantly running up to their elders to ask where were the fairies; and Mrs. Schilizzi said, "Whenever a child sees them, they become shy and change themselves into glow-worms."

She and Grenville, when they went back to the lodge, drank their coffee by the window in almost complete silence. Only now and then one or other of them said a faint commonplace something about the charm of the fading view; and once he rose, and seeing her slightly shiver, folded her cloak a little more closely round her.

"Won't you smoke?" she said presently. "I'm sure you would like to do so."

The floating puffs of his cigarette had an effect which was welcome. They seemed to excuse the silence, though they did succeed in breaking it. At last he asked her what it was she was thinking of. "I was counting the clouds," she replied, "which have still any pink left in them."

After a little while he spoke again. "You and I," he said, "must know each other very well, I think."

She asked why? as if sure of the answer, and yet waiting for it.

"Because we can sit like this," he said, "and talk without ever speaking."

For a time she made no response, except a look and a faint smile. But at last she rose from her seat and said, "It is time to go." He expostulated, telling her it was early; and indeed it was only nine.

"Don't keep me," she said very softly and gently. "Let me go. If you like you can walk back with me."

They were both standing by this time, but both seemed withheld from moving. Suddenly she uttered a word, quite naturally, and as if she hardly knew she was using it; but it went through his whole being as if it had been a spell. It was simply his own name, "Bobby." He said nothing. She continued as if talking to herself rather than to him—"That was the name of my favourite brother, and he is dead. He used to tell me everything; and I was more like a mother than a sister to him." Then clasping her hands, she raised her eyes to Grenville's. "Listen," she said. "Will you listen to me? I want to tell you something. You have been very good to me. You have taken care of me. I wanted to tell you—"

For a second or two she was motionless. Then with a sudden movement she came up to him, and put her hands on his coat. "Bobby," she whispered, lingering over the syllables, "I want you to be always good to me—always. Tell me that you will be—not loud—tell it me in my ear."

A silence followed, and only her eyes spoke. There was trouble in them, like the conflict of two meeting waters. A moment later he had stooped his head to answer her; but the answer, which was tender as a moth's wing on a flower, had been caught by her, not in her ear, but on her lips. The instant after, she had hidden her face in her hands, and when she removed them, in her eyes were tears and happiness. "I am tired," she said at last; "I must be going."

As yet he had not uttered a word; but now, looking half sadly at her, "Irma," he answered, "I will be to you the best I can be. You are right. You must go now. Come—I will take you back."

As they went into the open air, the night was wild with perfume. The forests lay around them—zones of enchanted shadow; the lake, glimmering like dim steel, was an enchanted water; but in Grenville's mind, as he returned, was a sense of sorrow and anxiety, bewildering and troubling, although it could not lessen a longing for the to-morrow which lay beyond the night.

As for her, however events might have tired her, they had at any rate not made her sleepy. A lamp stood on the table; her window was half open; a faint sound as of murmuring

boughts came in through it ; and before her, according to her custom, was the case that contained her diary. The last words she had written were the lines she took from Tennyson. Unity of style as a diarist was not her strong point, certainly ; nor did what she wrote now show any concern to make it so. It was hardly like a diary at all, indeed, except that it was prefaced by a date.

"To-night," she began, "if I am to make any true record, I must make it in a new way. I must address myself, not to myself as if I were my own reader, but to something that is outside me, and beyond me. I cannot tell what it is, or at all events I will not define it. I shall let its form and nature remain vague ; and I shall be able, by doing so, to speak to it more freely.

"Listen then, you, whatever you are, before whom I am going to lay my thoughts naked, as the sea lays bare to the moon its hushed and yet troubled waves. Let me feel my way by telling you one little trifle about my childhood. When I was a child, I used to read Ovid's *Metamorphoses* ; and I often amused myself by speculating how the people felt when they found themselves changing into trees and flowers and fountains. I think I know now ; for I am undergoing the same sort of change myself.

"Power to whom I speak, into what am I changing ? You will be able to see perhaps ; but I want myself to tell you. If I could laugh about it—and I don't see why I shouldn't, for one can always afford to laugh when quite sure that one is serious—I would tell you that I felt like Aaron's rod when it budded. As for Ovid, to go back to him, the bodies of his women turned into flowers. I feel like a flower turning into a woman's soul.

"How vague this seems—don't you think so ? Tell me—do you catch my meaning ? What I want to do, is to put it more plainly ; but when I try to do so in my mind, do you know what happens ? The sentences I shape to myself become metamorphosed like Ovid's heroines ; and instead of speaking about myself, I find myself speaking about—what ? About the warm silence of the night ; about the stealing scents of the forest, that just make the edge of the thin lace curtains tremble ; about the lapping of the lake that I can just hear at intervals, as at intervals when one is awake in the darkness one can just hear one's watch tick. Yes, I feel inclined to

—of confessing to you, about myself. But if I were really talking to you, and you could hear me, you who have so much experience, whilst I have so little, would be sure to read the whole of my confession in my voice.

“And now you must consider again. Is this a sign of anything—this, which I am about to tell you? I write these sentences slowly, pausing between each and dreaming—dreaming as I watch the flames of the candles tremble, and little white drops of wax chase one another down the sides; and as I dream with my pen balanced in my hand, fragments of poetry I have read, and had long forgotten—fragments of all kinds—come like bees in summer, winging their way into my mind; and each comes laden with some meaning which it never had before, and which is all my own—some pollen, some honey, some dew, out of life as I have myself lived it.

“Can you imagine how a rose feels when all its petals are unfolding? This is how I feel. I am unfolding towards you. Power to whom I speak, do you see what you have done for me? Oh, but you must not boast till you have heard the rest of the story; for if you have done this for me, there is something I have done for you. You must let some boasting be mine, for it is a pleasure I have never had before. I have done this. You, you who are so much stronger than I am—I have led you, I have influenced you. Can I go on? It is more difficult to do so than a moment ago I thought it would be.

“If you could ever see what I am writing, I wouldn’t write another word—I mean about this point. But you never will see it, so I will be intrepid and go on. There has been something in you—and I know what it was; it was regard for me, for I saw that in your eyes, and felt it in your whole demeanour—there has been something in you which has held you back from me, or held you up from me; and because of this I valued you all the more. But I have made you stoop; my power has been greater than yours. I have made you stoop till your lips have at last touched mine; and your touch is upon them still, like—what odd fancies come to me!—like the taste of manna, which means ‘what is it?’ And do you know how I did this?—how I drew you to me so near, so near? I begged you—not in so many words, but you knew my meaning perfectly—I begged you, I prayed you, to keep away from me.

And I meant it too, for I have never, never lied to you. But there was something in me at the same time that must have meant something quite different, and meant it more strongly. At least I suppose that was the case; for now we see the result. Isn't that so? Perhaps I shall teach you what a strange thing a woman's heart is. Its motto I think ought to be, 'I am nothing if logical.'

"And yet, seeing that in all this some responsibility—perhaps a very grave one—has been incurred somewhere, I don't mean to let you off, and say you are responsible for nothing. For do you know what you have done? I wonder—I wonder if you do. I hope you do—but I will tell you. You have entered my mind; you have moved amongst my thoughts, like a wind moving through a garden and stealing into the flowers, and fluttering their petals. You have been where no human being has ever been before, not even I myself, and you have said to me, 'See these flower-beds, see these flowers—you never knew, did you, that you had such things in your garden?' Why did you do this? You had no business to come there and wander there at all. But since you have come, do you know how I am going to punish you? I am going to keep you there. You never shall go away again.

"I began talking of you vaguely, as some impersonal power, and owing to a kind of shyness I thought of you vaguely; but by this time I have, I expect, pretty well betrayed myself. And yet I can no more tell you now, than I could at the beginning, all that I want to tell you. Let the air of the night, which we both are breathing, breathe it to you; let the forest murmur it. Let the lake, which is so near you, ripple it to you through your windows. Let me tell it to you myself, in telling you how I love my children. I feel sometimes as if nothing I could do for them could ever satisfy what I feel for them; that they could never be close enough to my heart; that my life could never completely enough be spent for theirs. As the arms of a mother long to enfold her child, so, my companion, my friend—what am I going to say?—I—I long to enfold you!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE following morning when she stepped out on her balcony, whilst a waiter inside was clattering with the white breakfast-cups, she murmured, feeling the freshness that seemed to pervade everything, "And the evening and the morning were the first day."

She presently looked towards the lodge, watching the ground in front of it, but she saw no one stirring; and a shadow—a very transparent shadow—of disappointment crossed her mind. "Does he like me?" she said to herself as she passed indoors. But the smile on her lips showed that she had little doubt about the answer.

At breakfast a packet was brought to her.

"What!" she exclaimed. "The post! I never thought that letters would follow me here so soon." But she saw the next moment that it was something that had come by hand; and she found, on undoing it, that it was a copy of Grenville's poems. She recollected now that she had asked him if he had a copy which he could lend her. He had said, "No"; but a line which he now enclosed ran thus—"By accident this was found in one of my boxes. I will come to you after breakfast. You have made me once more a poet." She turned over the pages with a placid, half-tender interest; but all of a sudden she started and blushed crimson. She had come to the fly-leaf; and that showed her his meaning, when he spoke of once more being a poet. Her initials were written on it, and under her initials these lines:—

"What may I write that shall hint of my love for you?

My pen trembles idly, and doubts as it dips.

Teach me some name that is tender enough for you:

Or else hold me silent, my love, with your lips."

Mrs. Schilizzi remained for some time with the book lying open in her lap, and her eyes fixed on the verses as if they were some strange flower. She had left the breakfast-table, and was sitting outside in the balcony, shielding her head from the sun with a large parasol, whilst a light breeze played with the soft tendrils of her hair. Her parasol and her dress were red; and as Grenville came presently over to the hotel from

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the hunting-lodge, he saw her from far off, like one brilliant patch of colour. She however did not see him till he came to her through the window of the sitting-room, and the sound of his steps roused her. She gave him no good-morning, except with her eyes. She looked up at him, her hand still resting on the book, and she merely said, "How could you?"

He returned her gaze, not with sadness exactly, but with gravity; and for a few moments both were silent. At last he said, "Are you angry with what I wrote? It was written before I knew what I was doing."

"No," she said, "not with it, but with myself for being made so happy by it."

There was a long silence, which for some reason had in it no embarrassment, as was shown by their manner when again they began speaking.

"What shall we do?" he said presently. "The manager tells me that he has a pony-carriage, and also that there are roads in the forest, a little rough, but still fit for driving."

"Oh," she exclaimed, "let us drive!" and her face was like a sunlit sea, from which the shadow of a summer cloud had floated.

The carriage was ordered, and they drove off together, first for a short way skirting the borders of the lake, and then following the road into the heart of the shade and leafage. The wheels waded in cart-ruts, and delightful grasses. Active glancing lights were playing on all sides amongst the branches; birds sang, squirrels whisked their tails, and the white throat of a stoat confronted them, who was tame with wonder. Mrs. Schilizzi seemed to Grenville, as she sat by him, to have the same relation to nature that an echo bears to a voice, and she filled his mental ear with a happy magical music. Every appreciation he shared with her, every passing laugh, was a new link uniting them, that was fashioned and fastened noiselessly.

Having driven for some way amongst pines, they at last reached a wood of beeches, where the undergrowth was cut into glades, evidently for the purposes of sport, and where the open ground was gleaming with moss and grasses. They left the pony in charge of a boy they had taken with them, and wandered away together through one of these inviting ways. By and by they seated themselves at the foot of a tree, she

more flower-like than ever, in her red dress amongst the greenness.

"Never," wrote Grenville afterwards, addressing her in imagination, "never shall I forget that scene, and the strange manner in which our acquaintance ripened. After we had sat there for a minute or two, talking of I cannot remember what, you turned to me with a half-mischievous laugh playing in your eyes and mouth, and yet with something in your manner that was serious, and you said to me, 'Bobby'—you said these two syllables lingeringly and softly, as if you liked the sound, and as if uttering them helped you to think—'I should,' you said, 'think you were a brother, if it were not for one thing. Do you know what that thing is? It is that I want to ask you one question—such a vain one. Do you think I am pretty? I don't believe you do.' Irma, when you asked me that, you were so simple in your very self-consciousness, your curiosity was awake so openly, that you made me absolutely simple in my answer. 'If you were anybody but yourself, I should think you *very* pretty, most likely. As it is, I see not your face, but the meaning of it.' And yet you were pretty, and I said you were. Round your red skirts, through the mosses, blue flowers, whose name I do not know, were pushing themselves like tiny spires; and above you ovals of green sunlight were swinging themselves on the diaphanous films of the beech-tree's young leaves; and we had for companions the hush and whisper of the forest, and the profound embowered solitude.

"Irma, you turned over in your mind what I said to you, as if you were a girl—a little bit of a girl—sucking a sugar-plum, and wondering how you liked it; and at last I saw that you were pleased, and you said, 'I am glad of that. I hate people who like me merely because I'm pretty.'

"We were both satisfied; and for a time we did nothing but pick up grasses and flowers, and ask each other if we knew their names. We were neither of us very good at botany. Suddenly, with an inconsequence that delighted me, you began to tell me of a place in a wood near your old home, where you used to go and hide yourself, taking your books with you. There was a copy of Keats—you were very fond of that; and also an *As You Like It*; and on one of them—I forget which—you had managed to spill some milk; and your brothers and sisters used to say of you, 'Irma always is so

messy.' And you laughed as you told me this, and said, 'I am very clean now.'

"Ah, Irma, and then you began telling me one little anecdote after another about your early years. I should wrong them by writing them down; they would die on paper. But the effect they produced on me still lives in my mind. They made all the atmosphere of your life's spring breathe about me. How you touched me, my little child, Irma! You seemed to be bringing out all your toys and treasures, and showing them to me one by one, with a child's simplicity mixed with a woman's humour; and with a something more than this—with a knowledge that to me you would never have thought of showing them, if you had not been confident that whatever was yours would interest me. There lay the magic of the moment, and its subtle spiritual alchemy, transmuting so much within me.

"What trifles such things are! Anybody who is not a fool is able, in some moods, to laugh at them: a fool is able to laugh at them in all moods indiscriminately. But nobody except a fool will be frightened by his own laughter. Men who know life best and whose sense of humour is keenest, best know that we never should value anything, if we valued only what we could never despise or laugh at. In fact what are commonly called the serious interests of life are valuable solely for the sake of what are commonly called its trifles. Let me think of ourselves in the wood, and that idle childish talk of ours, and compare ourselves—well, with me securing their money for the Egyptian bond-holders, or some man in the city who in a morning has made fifty thousand pounds. There, in that last case at all events, we have sense, we have seriousness, with a vengeance. Well—this city man—what does he do with his money? He buys—this is no uncommon thing—he buys for his wife, whom he probably calls his lady, a magnificent tiara of diamonds. But what are diamonds? Nothing but bright pebbles. The final end, then, of this serious thing—business—is to look at or exhibit some little pebbles twinkling. What is that compared with my vision of you?

"We most of us know, or have imagined, what intimate conversations are—conversations which open, and also bind, soul to soul. But few people could suspect that the most intimate conversation of all, is conversation full of such

infantine confidences as yours. Every word was a caress, the more tender and pathetic because unconscious. Well—after you had talked to me about these enchanted trifles, you suddenly checked yourself, and you said to me, ‘Look here—I am doing all the talking. It’s your turn now; you must tell things to me.’ I asked you what sort of things? You reflected a little; and then, Irma, then—looking at me with a persuasive gravity, you said, ‘Tell me why Italy seemed a prosaic place to you.’ I hesitated for reasons which by this time you entirely appreciate. They concerned another woman; and the devotion and respect I felt for you, and my sense of how impossible it would be for me to discuss you with any one else, gave me the same reverential feeling with regard to the woman I speak of. There seemed to be something wanting to justify me in even naming her. And yet I spoke the truth when I answered you, ‘I should like to tell you, but it would take a long time.’ And here, having mentioned time, I found an escape out of my difficulty. I pulled out my watch, and showed you how late it was. You started and laughed. ‘Help me up,’ you said; and as quick as our feet could carry us, we went to the pony-carriage, and returned. I lunched with you at the hotel. How well I remember the look of that meal—the brown crumpled skin of the children’s rice-pudding, and the clear blue shadows the dishes made on the table-cloth! I remember, too, saying, as we entered the room together, ‘So far as liking goes, I should like to tell you everything.’

“That evening, Irma, that evening I did so—that evening, full of fate for us.

“In the afternoon you had letters to write; so had I. You wrote yours in a summer-house by the lake, with your children playing round you. I went to write mine in my own rooms. But write I could not. I could not concentrate my thoughts on the people I wanted to address, or the subjects I wanted to deal with. Between me and the paper your image would come; and five minutes after five minutes I found myself sitting motionless, occupied with it only. At last I gave the attempt up, and pushed my pen away from me. I longed to go back to you; but I thought it the kindest thing to give you one hour to yourself at all events; so I kept away from you for all that weary time. I never knew before how long an hour could be, or how in an hour a sense of want could be

developed in one, springing up like the tree that grows under the napkin of an Indian juggler. At the end of that hour I went to you, and found you still in the summer-house. 'Have you written your letters?' I asked. You pointed to two sheets of note-paper, on each of which were scribbled a few lines, and which you began listlessly to put into their envelopes. 'I couldn't write,' you said. 'That is all I have done.' Irma, that pleased me. We had been going through the same experience.

"But then suddenly, to my intense surprise, I was annoyed with you. You said you were tired, and wanted to lie down in your own room. What was more natural? And yet—how to explain it I don't know—one of those wayward caprices of temper, which sometimes take the bit of reason in their mouths, and carry off the imagination on their backs, made me say to myself, you were tired because you were tired of me. 'Must you go?' I exclaimed, as if this petty parting were a tragedy. I felt I would have done anything to keep you. I had brought those verses with me which I had written about your child. I pulled them out, and asked you to let me read them; but instead of doing that, you made me give them up to you. 'How pretty they look!' you said; 'I will take them and read them by myself.' That annoyed me still more. Perhaps my poet's vanity was wounded, though I don't think so. Well, you went; and for an hour I was left alone. Fool that I was—what folly could have possessed me? I actually felt deserted, despised, miserable. Could you believe it? I went roaming about, treading as if I could tread time under my feet, still half angry with you, and yet longing, longing, longing for you as if we had been separated for weeks.

"The hour went by, and still you did not come. You had told me that, when you were rested, you would come out on the balcony. 'Come, come, come,' I said, 'and I will tell you everything. About Italy—and what kept me there—come, and I will tell you all. Every thought in my mind is longing to pour itself into yours.'

"Suddenly it occurred to me that the old man at the lodge had shown me a boat-house with some boats belonging to the Count in it. An idea came to me. We would dine at the lodge at six, and I would row you on the lake afterwards. This gave me at once an excuse for sending up a note to you.

I longed to be in communication with you, even through a sheet of note-paper. I turned towards the hotel, for at the time I was looking away from it, and there, Irma, I saw you sitting in the balcony. You waved your hand. I went; I believe I ran towards you. I was up-stairs, I was by your side in a moment; and your smile showed me how foolish my bitter dreams had been, and that whatever had tired you, you were not tired of me. I told you of my plan for our dinner, and our boating. You assented with pleasure; and then you said, softly and musically, as if you hardly knew you were saying it, as if it were a thought that had become embodied accidentally, 'Do you care for me! I thought just now that perhaps you were only amusing yourself.' 'I will tell you,' I said, 'on the lake what will make you think otherwise.'

"And then, these little things happened. You said, 'I have not been sleeping, I have been reading your verses. After I had read them, I could not close my eyes.' Presently, too, you told me this—that you had been writing your diary in a new way, as if you were talking to me. 'Of course,' you said, 'I shall not show it to you; but it helps me to fancy you are listening.' I told you that for the future I would do the same. 'If you care for it,' I said, 'I will leave it you, and you shall read it when I die.' This accounts for the form in which I am writing my diary now.

"We dined at the lodge—you and I and the children; and afterwards you and I went floating out over the water. 'Well,' you said presently, 'what are you going to tell me?' I said I was going to answer you the question you had asked me about Italy. I said, too, that you must be patient, and let me answer you in my own way. I began my story like this, as no doubt you remember. 'Since the days when you did your geography lessons out of a school-book, I dare say you have forgotten the very name of the city of Vicenza. It is little talked about; few tourists visit it; and yet, in all northern Italy, there are few places more interesting. Its narrow streets, blinded with Venetian shutters, are full of old palaces, having carved and pillared fronts, and great arches under whose shadow you enter, passing through them into stately courts. There are pale marble staircases, hushed and mysterious, leading to saloons and halls, whose ceilings are dim with paintings, whose great hearths are overhung with carvings and coats-of-arms, and whose walls are darkened

with old tortoise-shell cabinets. Down on the streets look rows of antique balconies, whose iron railings are twisted into leaves and lyres. There is a theatre built more than three hundred years ago, which still has on its stage some of its original scenery. Lamps at night twinkle before the images of saints. There are churches everywhere, full of twilight and gilding; and stray scents of incense meet you as you come round corners. You would think it the very place to dream in. Well—it was to Vicenza I went; and shall I tell you why I went there? It was to meet somebody to whom——’ Irma, when I said this you started, and exclaimed in a breathless whisper, ‘Somebody whom you are going to marry?’ I said, ‘If you had asked me that question three weeks ago, I should have answered Yes! Wait a moment, and you will see how I answer it now.’ Irma, what a true woman you are!—I can’t help laughing as I think of what you did then. Do you remember how you leaned forward, and exclaimed, ‘Tell me her name! I’m sure she is beautiful—and yet, no—I’m quite sure she was horrid!’ I smiled even then, at that. I told you who she was; and you said that she was very grand, and that she was this, and that, and the other, and that I had better go and marry her; and then you said, ‘Well—go on. How did you fall in love with her?’ I told you—I described her—her looks and character, even how she did her hair, and how she dressed; and you were delighted—Irma, you know you were—when you found out that her boots were not very well made. I described the feeling which, when I first met you, I had for her, and the mood of mind in which I went to meet her at Vicenza. Then I described our meeting there. I described her pleasure at meeting me—so placid and yet so frank, and the kind of pleasure I felt in response to it; and then I went on in this way. ‘All that was good and genuine and intelligent in her, I recognized as clearly as ever, and also the quiet high-breeding that betrayed itself—or should I say hid itself?—in every movement and gesture, and in every intonation of her voice. But, for some reason—I could not divine what—she seemed changed; she seemed faded; something seemed to have passed away from her; and I began to wonder what had been my condition of mind, when a girl like this could have tinged all my dreams with rose-colour. In due time we began—the whole party of us—to explore the town. She and I were constantly apart from the others. It seemed

tacitly arranged that this should be so ; and I tried to point out to her all the many things that touched my own imagination, and perfumed the very air with interest. One thing I soon found out. So far as mere facts went, she knew a great deal more about Vicenza than I did ; and small wonder indeed, for, as it appeared presently, she had just been learning by heart the contents of two guide-books. But as to the sentiment of the place, as to that strange, plaintive music that old things make in ears able to hear it—of this she knew nothing. For instance, those old iron balconies I told you of—I, each time I looked at them, thought of the women's forms that long ago had leaned on them palpitating, and of their expectant eyes. But my friend's mind was occupied with the fact that the two best specimens were to be found in a certain street, and that the date of them was 1500. I had been to Vicenza once before, alone. I had found it fascinating then ; but now, as I went through it with her, the town seemed changed, just as she seemed changed herself. Both somehow were disenchanted. Do you know how, after two days' sight-seeing, she summed up her impressions ? She said that Vicenza was very quaint and interesting, but it would be a dull little place to live in. The last statement was no doubt absolutely true ; but it affected me, when she made it, exactly as I should have been affected if, after having witnessed some wonderful religious ceremony, she had nothing to say about it except that the church was draughty. Well—now let me tell you this : I am coming to the end of my story. All the time that I was there going about with her, memories kept echoing in my mind of another relic of the past—an old castle in a forest on the borders of Hungary, where iron balconies overhung a forest of beech-trees, and where I stood with some one who was looking for something that never came. That day I seemed to have lived to music ; and I felt that now by contrast I first knew its full charm. That day was summer ; these were frost. That day I was at home. During these days I was an exile. I was home-sick, Irma, for our golden holiday. I didn't understand my feelings clearly then. I have learnt to do so since. I never said then to myself that the want in my life was you ; but I began to find out, and to feel a relief in finding, that, cordial as my friend was, there was nothing whatever in her manner which need mean necessarily anything more than cordiality. She was often conscious of not quite

understanding me. I could see this; and I could see something besides—that she found in the fact very little to discompose her; indeed, in a kindly and cheerful way she was amused by it. When I tell you that, how little I seem to be saying! In reality, I am saying so much. The result was this—I grew certain of two things: first, that although I might, if I made an effort, secure her affection easily, yet if I did not make that effort, she would not be much of a sufferer; secondly, that the effort was one which I had no heart to make. Affairs being in this position, fate did me a kind turn. It visited an aunt of my friend's with a bad attack of bronchitis. This lady, who was passing the spring in Florence, was lonely and nervous, and telegraphed to her relatives at Vicenza, the consequence being that they went to her, at a moment's notice. I went to the station with them—I said good-bye to my friend. We were cordial—nothing more. The train steamed off, and I was left alone on the platform, filled with a feeling of relief, and yet of blankness also; for it seemed that my future, which had lately showed a definite prospect, had all of a sudden melted into stormy clouds.' Just as I was saying this, Irma, you gave an exclamation. Some large rain-drops had fallen, and turning your face to the sky, you said, 'We are going, I think, to have stormy clouds now.' We looked about us. The sky had become purple; the stars were steadfast above us, and were wavering below us in the faint depths of the lake; but up from the west was floating a film of dusky vapour. Some more drops fell. We were not far from land, and we were both on shore before the real downpour had begun. We hastened into the lodge, where my room was already lamp-lit. We sat down. For a short time we were silent, and I was doubtful how to take up the broken thread of my history. By accident your eyes fell on a photograph lying upon my writing-table. It was a photograph of an old house. You took it up, and first because you felt it a relief to speak about an indifferent subject, and then because you saw how beautiful the house was, you broke out into expressions of admiration. You asked, 'Whose is it?' I said, 'It is mine—at least at present. But soon I am going to sell it.' You asked why, and I told you to get money. 'What!' you exclaimed, 'your old family home! If I had a place like that, I would sooner sell my life.' In your voice, when you said that, there was

something like contempt. I had not intended to tell you what the next moment I did tell you. 'It is my life,' I said; 'but I am going to sell it for the sake of another life.' Then I explained everything to you. I explained how all my future, so far as my fortune went, depended on my projected marriage; and how I found now this marriage to be impossible—impossible for one reason, which was you. You looked at me as if you could hardly believe your ears, and you drew a long breath, the sound of which I can hear now. You were sitting on a sofa. 'Bobby,' you said, and you could hardly speak for emotion, 'is this true? Are you really not going to marry her? And am I alone in the world no longer?' And then you said, 'And you have really not been playing with me? Come to me here, and tell me so.'

"Do you remember how on one occasion we talked about certain French novelists, and how we condemned parts of their writings? If one of these writers had taken up the thread of our history, his pages would probably be open to every condemnation we could pass upon them. But I will tell you why. What he would remember would be what we forget. What we remember, he would neither understand nor dream of.

"Irma, Irma, when two lives are united, it is a serious thing. Some changes in life are as unexpected as sudden death—and as great. Irma, we know both these truths. I took you back to your hotel when the rain had ended, and I said to you—do you remember what I said?—'There may be sorrow between us, but now there is no division.'"

CHAPTER XVII.

IN the gray of the morning Grenville woke, with a dull sense weighing on him that a vague something had happened, which he shrank from looking at, and when looked at would change him in his own eyes.

A man's life may be judged by two standards—some ideal standard of saintly or ascetic perfection, and the ordinary

standard of the world. With regard to that class of conduct to which all men apply, and men who are mad confine, the term morality, he had not been immaculate if tried by the first standard; but self-restrained, healthy, and honourable, if tried by the other. He had never so lived as to lose that mental quality which is in the inner world the equivalent of a clear atmosphere; on which, apart from any ideas of Puritanism, so much that is valuable in the human character depends; and which every one of sound judgment praises under the name of purity. However he might have acted on this or that occasion, his acts had never committed him to any course of life which the timidest conscience, in its most conventional mood, would look on as indefensible, or even needing defence. He had never made love, in any serious way, to any woman who might not have become his wife; and rarely without a thought that perhaps she would become so actually.

His present position was therefore wholly new to him. As occupied by others it was of course familiar enough. It was the position of men and women he was intimate with in his daily life—men and women of whom, whatever their fault in this respect—many seemed otherwise better, not worse than their more regular neighbours. But as occupied by himself, it was strange, unknown, untried; and he learnt, what surprises everybody who lives to learn it, that the constant sight of a burden borne by others, tells us little of what it will feel like when we come to bear it ourselves. Hitherto, as regarded the others, his mental attitude had been this. He had prided himself, not on condemning them, but on being different from them, and in this respect above them; and frequently though almost unconsciously comparing his own character with theirs, the comparison always flattered him by showing his own to advantage. And now he felt that at last he had joined the band from which, with secret pride, he so long had held aloof; whilst voices, half mocking, seemed to whisper about his bed, "Welcome, welcome. Now you are one of us." Half awake as he was, he was at the mercy of all those spectres—grotesque, obscure, monstrous—which beset the ante-chamber of the conscience, begging to be employed by it, and pretending to be employed by it, eager to bring to the soul madness, not sane self-judgment, and with which a sane conscience will have nothing at all to do. This flock of grimacing presences, whilst

he lay drowsy, filled him with horror of himself; and then his thoughts in a moment turned to the situation of another, and he wondered whether she was overtaken by the same humiliation and torture. This poignant consideration stung him into complete wakefulness. He roused himself; he sat up; he stared round him, with heavy-lidded eyes. He felt as if he had done her a wrong. He wondered if she were reproaching and scorning him. He wondered, with even more anxiety, how she would bear her own scorn of herself. The doors of his conscience opened, and her phantom came forth to meet him.

He moved to get up, but felt like a man on a steamer, who is so sea-sick that he dares not quit his berth. To get up would be to face realities: he had not the heart to do so. He did so at last, however; his will rallied its strength. He hastily put some clothes on, muffling himself in his great-coat. He softly unlocked the door, and he went out. The sky was a field of dim moving fleeces, damp as Gideon's, and so was the lake as well. All the ground was spongy and gray with dew. Nothing about him stirred but a slow and silent breeze, which just laid on his cheeks the touch of the weeping air. He looked blankly round him. In spite of its strange aspect everything spoke of her. He thought of their drive of yesterday, and the meeting of their sympathies in the sunshine; and then he started as his eyes rested on the hotel. Had it not been for that, yesterday might have been years ago; but that was a witness of her actual neighbourhood, as it slept with its closed white curtains, and its wet tiles glimmering. His eyelids were heavy still; his head ached. How, he asked himself, would she meet him? Or would she meet him at all? Perhaps, he thought, she would merely send him a letter, telling him coldly never again to see her; or perhaps, so some fancy whispered, she would be dead. He looked at his watch. It was only five o'clock. Hours must pass before he could have any news of her. He longed to throw himself at her feet, crying, "Forgive, forgive me!" Then again another thought tormented him. "Perhaps she will be saying to herself that I despise her."

Close to the lodge was a little patch of garden. There were some white roses in it, and some red tulips. He picked a bunch of these, and arranging them very carefully, went indoors, and put them in a tumbler of water. The cold air

was now making him sleepy. He sought his bed again, and slept till Fritz awoke him. He made Fritz tie the flowers together, and told him to take them at once to Mrs. Schilizzi, and ask if she had caught cold owing to last night's rain. "If she wishes not to see me," he thought, "she will send back word to say so. I shall escape the humiliation of finding her door closed." He waited miserably impatient for the return of Fritz. He waited for half an hour. At last a message came to say that she was quite well, and would hope to see him soon after ten o'clock. Along with the message came a small scrap of paper, with this scrawled on it—"How good of you! what lovely flowers!"

The words operated like a charm on him. A load fell from his heart. He realized that his coffee was at his bedside. He drank it, and rose instantly. He dressed with a hurried eagerness, and turned his steps to the hotel. As he approached it, his heart again sank, and his hand trembled as he knocked at the door of her sitting-room.

He entered. She was at breakfast with her children, and some of his flowers were in the breast of her red dress. She looked full at him. There was no anger in her face, there was no confusion, and her voice still had its laugh, like the ripple of a brook in spring-time. The only change in her—and indeed there was a change—was the growth in her eyes, and smile of an inquiring pathetic earnestness.

"I see," he said, by way of saying something, "that Fritz has brought you my flowers."

"Yes," she murmured, pointing him to a chair at the table. "I know, too, why you sent them. Sit down and have some coffee with us. Olga, get him a cup."

Grenville declined.

"Won't you?" she said. "You look tired."

"Do I?" he said; "I've been thinking."

"Yes," she replied; "so have I—thinking about many things. Come outside on the balcony. The children can finish by themselves. Tell me," she said, in a whisper, as soon as they were alone together, "you don't hate me, do you? Speak, Bobby, and tell me!"

Grenville looked at her in silence, as if vainly seeking for words. At last he said slowly, "I don't want to use exaggerated language."

She gave a gasp, as if a knife had wounded her. "What!"

she exclaimed. "Then you do hate me? Tell me—do you?"

"I don't want," he repeated, "to use exaggerated language; but I believe I am not exaggerating if I tell you that I would willingly die for you."

He was surprised himself at the almost bald intensity which he heard in his own voice as he quietly said this. The effect on her was like that of the sun reflecting itself in water. The returning smile on her lips, and the trusting affection in her eyes, which, deep as it was, seemed as if yet it were but half unfolded, filled him with something which would have been overwhelming happiness, if he had not, in consequence of his recent trouble and suffering, felt it as rather the blessing of overwhelming peace.

And yet through all this, though he was scarcely conscious of the fact, there was something in her which troubled and perplexed him, and was a riddle—a riddle, however, which she could herself have answered, could she only have confessed herself to him, as she did a few hours later to her diary. For although she had calmed him, yet in a certain way she had shocked him. He feared she would have suffered too much: it seemed as if she had suffered nothing. But she too, like him, had been face to face with self; and had confronted conscience with a braver face than he had, though naturally she had expected an even keener wound from it. Her husband's social connections had principally been amongst the severest middle-class, and she had thus seen how the just persons who need no repentance were accustomed to throw stones at women in her present position, as eagerly as little *gamins* in the street throw stones at a cat; and she had feared that her own conscience might stone her in the same way. This treatment, however, she had not experienced. Her conscience had behaved very differently from his; and the reason was, not indeed the greater intensity, but the greater simplicity of her own emotion, and a certain moral fortitude greater than his, which it had endowed her with. What she wrote in her diary was as follows—

"Considering what I have to write about, it seems odd that I can take up my pen so calmly. But the oddness is not due to anything that I feel in myself, but to the discrepancy between that and what I ought to feel, according to conventional theory. In connection with the step I have taken, my

own impression of myself is most vivid. One often reads stories of a soul's surprise after death at its own condition, so completely different from what was expected. I am like such a soul. Nothing has happened to me which conventional theory would demand. I have crossed a chasm into which I ought to have fallen, whose depths are said to be full of mire and rocks ; but something has borne me up—has carried me through the air—I am neither soiled nor injured.

"If I were I would confess it. When I awoke I thought I must be, and each moment I was afraid I should find myself a spiritual wreck. As a matter of fact, however, to my surprise I found myself sound and whole. Why should I pretend otherwise ? I should not mend matters by lying. I will be honest and pretend nothing. I ought to feel degraded—that may be—but I don't. This is the plain truth—I can't say more than that.

"And yet I can—I can say a great deal more. I have not said half yet. If I fail to feel what the occasion is supposed to demand, it is not from callousness. If I were really degraded, surely—surely I should know the signs of it. I should feel unworthy of doing or thinking anything good ; my eyes would flinch from the thought of ideal goodness ; and somehow and somewhere I should be hardened. But I am conscious of nothing of this kind. No—no. On the contrary, never has affection, or the sense of goodness and beauty, filled my heart so full as they fill it now. My children to-day are more dear to me than ever. The desire for self-sacrifice, the desire for prayer, trouble me, and are ever in my heart. I am not deceiving myself. I can distinguish good from evil as well as most people ; and my good thoughts and my pure thoughts—I know them as my guardian angels. After the step I had taken, I feared they would have deserted me ; but I look about me, and they keep me company still—as near me as ever, as much mine as ever. And he is mine also, and keeps me company along with them."

Such being her condition in her own eyes, what possessed her mind when she met him again that morning, was a sense not of abasement or trouble, but of exaltation—a sense not of a lost but rather of a transfigured universe ; and gradually Grenville's spirit adjusted itself under the direction of hers, as though it were stronger than his own, and had mastered life more fully.

"I want you," she said presently, "to be with me all to-day. The children have their lessons to do. Let them come with us into the summer-house, and whilst they work you shall read to me."

He was himself not in a mood for reading; but he felt, for a reason which by and by became more clear to him, that this did but make him happier and more zealous in obeying her. As they returned to the hotel for luncheon, he picked up a broken flint. "Do you think that pretty?" he said. "Don't you? I wish you did."

She asked why.

"Because," he said, "if it would only give you pleasure, I would willingly sit all day long and break stones for you."

Few things are so constantly misinterpreted as the changes of women's moods, by the perverse faculties of men. After luncheon, contrary to what she said in the morning, Mrs. Schilizzi surprised Grenville by begging him to leave her to herself for a little, explaining her words by adding, "till four o'clock." He felt that to do this was a tax on his self-denial not quite so agreeable as that she had lately made on it. But he hid his reluctance, and left her when she wished. Her first step was to write—and she was some time in doing so—the passage in her diary which was just now quoted; and then, not being strong, she lay down to rest, repeating it with closed eyes, and reaffirming its meaning.

He, meanwhile, was undergoing a very different experience. He walked restlessly along the borders of the lake, and, removed from her presence, the charm of which seemed to protect him, the first bitterness of his waking mood revived in him, and he now found it aggravated by the sense that she did not share it. He hardly dared to scrutinize what was going on within him; he tried to believe it was mere impatience to be with her again. But when the time came to go back to her, something had begun to stir in him which, though he would not recognize it, was like anger against her; and shrinking from this, and indignant at it, he told it to get behind him: but it did not vanish; it dogged him like some cowed figure, and kept him a prey to self-reproach and dejection. He did his utmost to disguise from her the change that had overtaken him; and his voice recovered its tenderness, but he could not recover his spirits. They had arranged to take the children for a walk amongst the shadows of the

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forest ; and he tried to hide his condition in his kindness and his attention to them. For a time this succeeded ; but at last the truth was felt by her, his replies when he spoke to her were so short, and his smiles were so slow in coming. At last she said to him with a certain constrained abruptness—

“I know why you are so moody. You are afraid you have done me an injury, though you might perhaps have thought of it a trifle sooner. But leave that matter to me. We have quite enough each to do to bear our own responsibilities.”

To his morbidly sensitive ear her voice seemed hard and flippant. He hung his head, and walked on in silence.

“Well,” she said presently, “are you not going to speak to me?”

He looked at her, and was wounded afresh by a smile that seemed almost mocking.

“Perhaps,” he said, “if what you tell me is true, I had better go and bear my responsibility in solitude.”

“If you like to,” she answered, “certainly.”

He stopped short in his walk, and fixed a long look on her. Then he held out his hand, and quietly said, “Good-bye.”

“Good-bye,” she repeated, and turning away moved on. He remained where he was, leaning listlessly against a tree. A swarm of torturing thoughts at once sprang at him out of their ambush, accusing with hateful voices the woman from whom he was parting himself.

“You,” they said to him, “are by no means her first lover. You are not the first in fact, and you have not even the first place in her fancy.”

That these suggestions came to his mind like truths it is too much to say ; but they irritated him like the stings of mosquitoes, with a pain which he despised whilst it maddened him. He looked after her to see if she were out of sight. She was not. She was at some distance, but just as his eyes turned to her, she too, stopping, had turned a glance towards him—a glance which, though still resentful, seemed to be full of melancholy. He hurried towards her, as though she were his life escaping him, which he must return to, though the process were full of pain.

“Irma,” he said, “forgive me. My soul will kill itself if I leave you.”

They walked on side by side, each of them still troubled. At last she spoke.

"It seemed," she said coldly but yet gently, "that whatever your soul will do, you could leave me very easily. "I never," she went on presently, and her voice was a little harder, "I never knew a man take offence so quickly."

They had reached an open spot, where the children were picking blue-bells.

"I am rather tired," she said. "I am going to sit down. May I ask you to be so kind as to spread my cloak on the ground?"

He did so, and sat down by her. Her tone had filled him with fresh bitterness, and inflamed anew the stings of all his recent suspicions. He was afraid to speak for fear of what he should hear himself saying; but at last, slowly and firmly, as if he were addressing a stranger—

"I am sorry," he said, "that my temper is so very unreasonable, and that I show to so little advantage by the side of your former lovers."

She started in horror, and looked at him, as if she could hardly believe her ears.

"How can you," she gasped, "say a thing like that to me!" Her eyes held him motionless. They at once petitioned and judged him. They slowly filled with tears, and he saw that her lips trembled. Instead of reproaching him she helplessly leaned towards him, and resting her arm on his knee, explored his face wistfully. "Bobby," she said, "you shouldn't treat me like that. For your sake I have taken off my armour, and now you are stabbing me, after you have made me defenceless. Tell me—what is it? Why do you think bad things of me?"

He tried to explain. He did so very lamely; but she realized that he was reminding her of something she had said about "other men."

"I'm not perfect," she said, "I know that. I would willingly tell you all there is to tell; but it's not much. I've been interested in other men—yes, I have been interested; but that's all. Do you believe me? You must. It is the entire truth. I don't quite know," she continued, "what you are thinking about me. I have seen so much less of the world than you. I believe I'm so much simpler."

"Irma," he said, "Irma, are you?"

"I think so. From you, at least, I have nothing I wish to hide; and you are the only person to whom I can say that, or

ever could have said it. Once—yes, I must confess this—I thought I could have loved one man; but I didn't; and no man, not even that one, has ever so much as held my hand. Bobby—you must believe me."

Disbelief was impossible. He was conquered: he showed her that he was so. Her voice slowly changed to a happy murmur, which still suggested tears, but tears with a rainbow spanning them.

"I was like a dog," she said, "that had been beaten all its life. I trusted in you; and you—you were more cruel than any one."

The words sounded like a reproach, but really they were the seal of a reconciliation. She seemed to be giving the keys of her heart into his hands—to be placing herself wholly at his mercy. Her soul lay before him as if it were clear water; he was filled by the sense of how wholly her entire being was his; and he felt that their union had been but half complete till now. The wood, which a moment ago had been chilled with gloom and bitterness, was once more full of sunshine and moss-scented air and flowers. This pair, lately so taciturn, sent out their voices to the children; and the laughter of the children, which answered them, was hardly more gay than theirs.

Grenville noticed, as an experience altogether new to him, these sharp and rapid changes from happiness to aggravated misery, and from misery again to happiness. His nature had hitherto been equable under all vicissitudes. He had never suspected it to be capable of being shaken and moved so violently. But happiness, at all events, was what possessed him now; and when it ceased at intervals to sparkle, it did but become peace.

All through dinner that evening enchantment hung in the air. In the warm dusk afterwards the children played amongst the glow-worms; and then, when the nurse came out, calling them and telling them it was bed-time, Grenville and his companion again committed themselves to the boat, and glided off together into the stillness between the sky and water.

The boat was commodious; and when he had rowed some way, he shipped his oars, and silently seated himself beside her. They hardly, for the time, felt any need for talking. Each trusted the other to think and to brood in silence, each

knowing that each was being taken into the other's life. All nature conspired to assist the process, isolating them as if they two were the only human beings in the world, and making all ties unimaginable except that which bound them to one another. Over their heads was the veil of the immeasurable twilight. Stars—the immemorial friends of lovers—were showing themselves; a young moon glittered like liquid silver. All around, the forests, softly dim and mysterious, guarded the lake, as they stood above their own reflections; and down in the depths below were the horns of the floating crescent.

Every trace of bitterness was gone from his heart; every wound was healed in hers. "But peace," as he wrote subsequently, "need not mean, and did not mean then, quiescence. An element in my passion," he went on, "which had already made itself felt, but which I had not understood clearly, was now coming to the surface, and growing in power as it did so. This, Irma, was a longing not only to enjoy your society, but to suffer for the sake of enjoying it. I wished to prove in this way, not only to you, but to myself, the truth of my devotion to you. I wished to bear witness to it by some species of martyrdom. I am like David, I would not offer you that which costs me nothing." Of what this feeling meant, and of what it would one day lead to, even yet he was not fully aware; but the consciousness of it even then gave wings to his passion, and enabled him to conclude his diary for the day thus—"For the first time in my life I have realized, from my own experience, how matter and spirit are capable of being fused together, how the body can rise with the soul instead of weighing it down, and how instead of dying it can be changed."

Before they returned, he said to her hesitatingly, almost shyly, "There is something I want to tell you. If every husband loved his wife as well as I love you, marriage would indeed be a sacrament, and earth long ago would have been heaven. If love like this is degradation, there is no elevation possible."

"Bobby," she said, "why do you fret yourself? I know that my soul is living—now for the first time. You said you would die for me. My wish is to live for you."

She had arrived at the same self-knowledge as he had; only he had reached it gradually, by a conscious and painful

progress, in the teeth of adverse prepossessions, which had to be met and reasoned with. To her, everything, though strange, had been entirely simple. Thus far she had not reasoned about anything—about sacrifice, or flesh, or spirit. Her thoughts were lost in him; she had ceased to busy them with herself. She only remembered herself when his words had reminded her of it; and later on, when again they had found themselves on shore, and when by and by the doors of the hotel received her, she hardly knew that her feet had touched the earth, or that her cheeks were like fluttered rose-petals.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SOME women perhaps may not be pleased to hear it, but women influence men not by how they argue, but by what they are—by the effect which their arguing has, not on others, but on themselves. And Mrs. Schilizzi in this way affected Grenville more than volumes of philosophy could have done, written in defence of his position. The serenity of her self-confidence communicated itself to him, and became for the time being the moral foundation of his life. She was his support, and he rested on her.

Days and evenings now passed on without their counting them, varying little in respect of outer incidents, but witnessing, so far as their own consciousness was concerned, the formation of a new world either of reality or illusion. What it was, they had to learn by experience. Its formation was an experience by itself.

From the first moment of his regarding her with any attention, he had not only felt her temperament to be attractive to his own, but he had discovered, under a misleading manner, that her intellect was active, and that her knowledge, though it was scattered, was curiously extensive. He now learnt how her education had been the work solely of herself. No guiding hand had been ever held out to help her. She had been the lonely sower of seed in her own soul; and some of the seeds had sprung up like wild-flowers; others

had hardly sprouted ; and others, perhaps most, were sleeping. On these his thoughts seemed to descend like rain ; and ground that before looked barren, began to grow green with life.

Apart from his personal attachment to her, she was in this way singularly interesting. She had found herself solitary in the wilderness of possible knowledge, with nothing to guide her choice of what she would try to know, except the needs of her own nature, so far as she was able to understand it. Whatever, therefore, she had tried to learn, she had tried to learn not because it was considered by others as an article essential to a decorously upholstered mind, but solely because a conscious want told her it would be of interest to herself. Thus, whether it bore immediate fruits or not, what she learnt passed at once into her life, and became part of her being.

Her knowledge in consequence was certainly the strangest medley ; and the books she had attacked, not only modern but ancient, at first made Grenville smile at her naïve temerity. But presently he admired her for the unexpected degree to which she had mastered them. In many cases, without any philosophical training, she had gone straight to a point which students seized only after painful labour ; and although as to much her judgments and her knowledge were childish, she had one gift at all events which philosophers may envy children. She had the vividness, the early freshness of vision, which belongs to those who make their own discoveries, and see things for the first time. She viewed the knowledge as Columbus viewed America.

Grenville in talking to her felt as if he were being born again, and were half recovering through her this long-lost, irrecoverable faculty. But for what he received he gave her a full equivalent. Of the services he rendered her, one of the chief was this. She had been shy of accepting and using her own conclusions ; he showed her their value ; and partly owing to his assistance, partly owing to a development of her own self-confidence, her ideas began to marshal themselves into new order. She had read, for instance, a good deal of German criticisms on the text and history of the Bible, and the origin of Christian doctrines ; but she had been totally unaware of the degree of reputation or influence enjoyed by the critics, or how thought in general had been affected by

them. All sorts of books on morals she had studied in the same way, assenting or not assenting to the views expressed in them ; but whilst clinging to her own opinion, doubtful of what value to attach to it. Grenville was the first person she had ever met to whom such thoughts and subjects were familiar, or at any rate the first to whom she had ever been able to speak about them ; and gradually through his conversation she realized her intellectual bearings.

This process of education was embroidered on hours that seemed idle. They read their books to the music of the lake or forest ; when they closed the pages, some wild wood-flower would be their marker ; when their attention was tired, the laughter of the children would refresh them. All their speculations about life were but parts of intense living, tinged and vivified by the blood of the coloured moments. Sometimes they would spend an entire morning in fishing, and untangle their views and the children's lines alternately. She would pause in the middle of her philosophy to ask him how he liked her dress ; and she often relieved some mood of prolonged seriousness by surprising him at dinner or luncheon with one he had not seen before.

"I felt," she would say laughing, "that it was quite necessary for me to show it to you ; and if it is too smart for a forest, why there's no one but you to see it."

Such little exhibitions of true feminine vanity gave an added charm to her deeper and more spiritual qualities ; and her philosophy itself would constantly show its womanhood, when, under the influence of some inward emotion, or some aspect of nature, it would suddenly become silent, and then reappear as poetry. But all their conversation, indeed, even when it seemed to be driest, was permeated by the poetry of life in its subtlest form. Even a discussion of a book such as Mill's *Logic*, about which one day she questioned him with great shrewdness, had the same charm in it by which all their discussions were transfigured. It was a living act of relationship between him and her ; a conscious interchange of embracing and interlacing thoughts. And the forests, and the wood-flowers, with the sunlight laughing amongst the leaves, and the smell of the bog-myrtle, and the colours of the silent sunsets, mixed themselves with all these incidents of her intellectual growth, or surrounded them with a garland, until, as she said in her diary with regard to this period,

"Every day of my life is like a page out of an illuminated missal."

Such being the character of the lovers, and of the subjects which occupied their attention, it is not to be supposed that, in spite of their happiness, the peculiarity of their situation, with the question of how far it was defensible, did not force itself on their thoughts. It did; but owing to a variety of reasons, their doubts showed themselves only to be set at rest. In the first place, they knew that their mutual attachment in itself deserved none of the opprobrious epithets which conventional respectability would apply to it. To call it shameful, or impure, or degraded, would, they felt, be utterly inappropriate. But however elevated it might be in itself, what was to be said for it if taken in connection with its circumstances? So far as Grenville was concerned, Mrs. Schilizzi, without meaning it, was constantly answering this question afresh. She often mentioned her husband, showing no shrinking in doing so; and her tone, not resentful, merely apathetic, together with many details which she let fall as to his treatment of her, showed how completely she knew herself to be nothing to him—how little interest in her he had, or even pretended to have. And whatever effect this fact had upon Grenville, its effect upon her was naturally yet more direct. At the same time their singular isolation from the world made many other considerations so dim as to be hardly imaginable; and of the conventional judgments which that remote world might pass upon them, some seemed based on beliefs no longer tenable, and others on a necessary ignorance of their own characters and circumstances. They read their situation only by its own internal light; and the only transgression they could see in it, was one not of depravity, but of daring. They felt like two lonely voyagers striking out a course for themselves, who indeed had lost their landmarks, but had for their guide a star.

They had no shyness in discussing this conclusion, whenever they were visited at intervals by any misgivings as to its soundness; because their passion, justifying itself by its own intensity, made them feel that such misgivings must be in themselves unsound. But they never neglected them, or pushed them aside contemptuously. As each suggested itself, they examined it and treated it tenderly, like a child who cried in the dark, and had to be soothed to sleep.

On one occasion, for instance, as if trying to alarm her conscience, she had urged that no one could have a right to make a law for himself, or to do what would injure society if everybody followed his example; and he had answered her—

“You forget the most important part of the matter. You forget that what a man does, on any given occasion, is not only that part—that small part—of his act which can be named in a short commandment. His act includes his entire inward disposition, his circumstances, and those of others connected with him; and the quality of his act depends principally on these. Amplify your supposition thus, and see what then comes of it. If all the unhappy couples in the world were to re-sort themselves to-morrow, and were to follow our example in this fuller and truer sense, by doing as we do, and by being as we are, would the world be happier or unhappier, purer or more impure?”

As for him, his doubts and answers to them were comparatively simple and obvious; and after everything else had been said, the thought that chiefly supported him—as was but natural in the case of a man—was this—

“If I am not injuring her, I am injuring no one. If I am not ruining her life, I am redeeming it.”

But on her mind her position had an effect far wider. As she examined herself, she seemed to be examining not her own fate only, but the possible fate of any woman; not herself only, but womanhood; and she felt herself possessed of a sudden clairvoyance into its claims. About this general aspect of the matter, indeed, she was diffident of speaking to Grenville. She was anxious to show him how honestly she could defend herself; she was too timid to appear as a philosopher on behalf of her sex generally. But she expressed in her diary what she could not confide even to her friend, and often forgot her own case in contemplating that of others.

One evening, for instance, she wrote as follows; and it will serve to show what was taking place in her mind—

“If marriage is a sacrament, as the Roman Church says it is, it is a sacrament I have violated. I have committed a sin:—there is no getting over that. But if this view be true, I have lived in sin always, ever since I was a child, for I have neglected sacraments which are even more important. I have never been to confession; I have never been to mass. But if

I am justified in declining to regard myself as a life-long sinner—in other words, if I am justified in not being a Roman Catholic, but in working things out as best I may for myself, which indeed I have been always left to do—then I can speak to myself, and to others about myself, in a very different way. I can say that it is not I who in this case am wrong, but the conception of marriage and of woman's nature, tested by which I seem so.

"For who shall tell me that this is not true? Different women have different needs; and the conditions under which many will thrive will kill others. Of course it may be said that life's chief solace is duty, and that it is open to all of us to do that. But even supposing that we all of us acted on this theory, no one could be inhuman enough to deny that some personal happiness is craved for by our nature, to support us in our painful efforts. Well—some women can be made happy by circumstances that are generally pleasing—by a wide circle of friends, and social activities and successes. But with others, the first need of their lives is some close sympathy and companionship; without this they can enjoy, or indeed be fit for, nothing else; and I don't think that these are the worst women.

"Now if a woman of this kind, young and inexperienced, is married to a man who can never be her companion—married to him, as often happens, before she really knows what she is doing—to what is she condemned by that which conventionally is called morality? I don't want to speak too generally; but indeed I may say this much. Sometimes such a woman is condemned to absolute solitude. When she walks up to the altar she is literally taking the veil, not as a willing bride, but as a nun with no vocation. From that moment the highest faculties of her soul are condemned to be never exercised, its deepest needs never to be satisfied. A husband, by a marriage of this kind, becomes his wife's murderer. He kills her by starvation. He can give her no food himself; and his one active function is to prevent any one else from giving her any. Is a marriage of this sort a true marriage at all, which shuts a woman out from everything it was meant to open to her? How many women could write that question in tears and blood!

"Of all the great errors of life, an unhappy marriage is for a young wife the greatest. It stands alone in being the most

innocent, and also the most remediable. Why must it be the only one for which no remedy is allowed?

"I am not unreasonable—no. We must all of us suffer much; but surely there is a point when unnecessary suffering becomes superfluous suffering. I think that's true. I would lay down the following rule—a rule indeed which I did my best to follow. Let a wife try—I do not say till seven times, but even to seventy times seven—to give her best to her husband, and get from him something that corresponds to it. Let her do that:—but if, after all her endeavours, he not only refuses to give what her spirit asks of him, but to receive and acknowledge what it offers him, then is it not a mere senseless tyranny to ordain that things which one man has rejected as worth nothing she may not offer to another, to whom they would perhaps be everything?

"The more I think of it, the more terrible does marriage, as conventionally regarded, seem to me for some women. I see this at times with such a ghastly clearness that I wonder at its escaping any one. For the women I am thinking of, there ought to be a new marriage service written; and the words of it, which need be very few, should say what it really means for them. So far as all their highest sympathies are concerned, and all their capacities for affection other than those which are maternal, such a marriage service might be comprised in Christ's curse on the fig-tree—'Let no fruit henceforward grow on thee for ever!' And of many such women it indeed might be truly said, 'How soon is the fig-tree which was cursed withered away!'"

A day or two later she went on thus—

"I have been looking back at what I have written. I am anxious to be fair; and I see an important objection to it; but I see also an equally important answer. It may, no doubt, be urged that if the principle I have hinted at were once admitted and embodied in laws, a woman would be formally justified in yielding herself to any wanton caprice; and family life would have no stability whatever. Yes—but this is only so, not because the principle is bad, but because it is one which laws never can embody fully; because whilst it applies to some cases, it does not apply to others, which, though inwardly different, outwardly seem identical; and because none but those who are themselves concerned can know if it applies to their own.

"What then? Does it come to this—that conduct is right or wrong not in proportion to the extent to which facts justify it, but in proportion to the amount of evidence that could be adduced for such facts in a law-court? No, no,—I will never admit that. If the laws cannot always be fair to us, it is our misfortune; but we shall not mend matters by being unfair to ourselves.

"Here, however, comes another question. I say the law cannot always distinguish one case from another; but I have been trying to think out also how we ourselves are to do so. How, of the women whose conduct needs defence, are we to distinguish the good woman from the bad one? I am not a logician—I can't put things properly; but I can answer the question to my own satisfaction by merely saying one thing, which I know to be true. Some of the women who, finding no love in marriage, have by the need of their nature been driven to seek it somewhere, are the women who, if married happily, would have been most passionately faithful to their husbands. As for myself, I can indeed speak with confidence. I have never wished to wander; I have only wished for this—to find some one to whom all my nature may be true. And I have found him!—I have found him!"

When, instead of writing about such matters, she spoke about them to Grenville, there was often something pathetic in her perfect openness and simplicity.

Once she said to him, "Last night I was thinking this—that I should never again be able to despise any one. But why should I? Is that the test of virtue? You don't think—do you, Bobby—that virtue is the position which enables us to despise others?"

But her questionings of her position, whether expressed dispassionately in writing, or more timidly and more appealingly in speech, had always the same ending. Each new doubt gave way to a new impulse of certainty; and love, for a time kept aloof by argument, returned to enjoy the triumph which argument had again won for it, at once supporting and overwhelming her more completely. He too shared in the result. He followed her even when he seemed to be her guide.

At last came a night, when for the last time in their solitude she felt or gave expression to any of these misgivings. They were together in the boat, which was motionless far out

on the lake. The surface of the water was so still as to be invisible. It showed not itself, but only an inverted heaven. Suddenly she said to him after a long silence, during which her eyes had been fixed on the clouds and stars, "I wonder"—and her eyes now fixed themselves upon his—"I wonder, if some day I were to become very good, whether you would still go on caring for me. Tell me, dear—tell me—would you? You see I often think how I should condemn us, supposing we were two other people."

"If we were not ourselves," he said, answering her in her own words almost, "we should not know the things that are really the most essential facts of our case. Irma," he went on, "listen to me a little. You talk of becoming 'good.' Of course I understand your meaning. Good and bad, pure and impure—no two people could better understand the difference; but our union, whether we condemn or justify it, is not in itself degraded by that which you now are thinking of; rather it is completed and sealed by it. What we call passion is an impulse which can raise men or unutterably degrade them. How shall we each tell ourselves which, in our own case, is its tendency? Not by interrogating the passionate impulse itself, but by asking ourselves what other impulse it awakens in us—what layer of thoughts it touches and sets free. What are the thoughts that I, Irma, have offered you? Have I ever breathed to you one that was impure or shameful? Have I ever breathed to you one that was not half-brother to a prayer? My passion for you is worship, and my whole being is cleansed by it."

"Stop, stop," she said. "No, go on; go on. Do you remember what you told me once, that for people who loved truly you believed the heavens were opened as truly as they were for Stephen? Look up; look up. It seems as if they were opened now. Come, be near me. You never must go away."

"Irma, Irma, can this indeed be living? It seems to me to be so much more than life. See the depth above us, and the depth reflected under us, holding endless space, and all the endless ages, and ourselves like a ball of thistle-down floating between two eternities. Where that milky light is are new universes forming themselves—the book of their genesis yet remains to be written. From some of these stars the arrows that to-night reach us started on their vibrating

way before Eve's foot was in Eden. Think of the worlds forming, think of the worlds shining, and the darkened suns and systems mute in the night of time. To us, to us, what can it all say, more than the sea says to a rainbow in one tossed bubble of foam? And yet, Irma, to me it seems that it says something."

"What does it say?" she murmured, almost inaudibly.

"It asks, can it have no meaning for us, seeing that we are born of it? And can we be out of harmony with it, seeing that it speaks to us now?"

By and by that night, when he entered the lodge solitary, he heard himself utter aloud this passionate exclamation—"Can it be true? Can it be I am not dreaming? Is the rose indeed in my hands that I always had thought fabulous? Barren garden of life, bitter frost-bitten furrows, can it be that you have blossomed for me into this one wonderful flower?"

CHAPTER XIX.

Most people who have ever amused their idleness by watching the reflections of objects in clear water, are familiar with the experience of seeing real rocks or pebbles force themselves into view through the visionary clouds or foliage. Grenville and Mrs. Schilizzi had soon an experience that was similar, when a packet of forwarded letters arrived one morning from Lichtenbourg.

They were at breakfast at the time, in her sitting-room, the children with them; and Fritz, who brought in a small packet for her, informed his master that for him there was another which had been taken to the lodge. Mrs. Schilizzi glanced hastily at the envelopes. She tore open two or three, and read the contents indifferently; but finally she came to one at which her expression changed. Grenville looked at her with a vague misgiving, silently asking her for an explanation.

"It is from my mother-in-law," she said. "I don't know what to do. I really can hardly understand her. It seems that she wants me to go back at once to London."

"What has happened?" he asked. "Is it illness? Is it anything serious?"

"No," she said; "only business. I remember something about it; and something has to be done, about which I have to be consulted, and—more important still—for which they require my signature."

She showed Grenville the letter, and explained what she understood of the case to him. In spite of the rude break which it would make in their present existence, he saw that for her own sake it was really well that she should go; and he pointed out to her what she had not at first realized—that the whole business could be settled within a week.

"Leave the children here," he said, "and ask the Princess to come to them; and before ten days are over you can easily be back again."

"And you," she said, "what will you do?"

"I will come to England also. Who knows but that my letters may also contain a summons? I had but six weeks of freedom, and four have already gone."

She started at these last words, and suddenly seemed scared.

"Yes," she faltered, "yes; and what will you do then?"

His eyes dropped. He was silent, lost in perplexed thought. She let the letter fall from her hands, helplessly.

"I feel," she said at last, "as if we had been sailing in a boat of dreams, and were now, with all that belongs to us, being lost upon the rocks of reality."

Her speech roused Grenville. "Nonsense," he exclaimed with a vigour which approached roughness, but which brought her, for this very reason, a certain sense of comfort. "If you and I are only realities to one another, we shall find that it is not our boat which is the dream, but the rocks, which you fear will wreck it. Come, you mustn't be downcast. Let me go to the lodge, and look at my own letters; and when I come back you shall see me in the character of a practical man."

There was every need, he found, for at once redeeming this promise. It is true that none of his letters was an absolute summons to return; but there were amongst them two important communications which made him see that his instant return would be desirable. One was from his man of business, the other from the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Both of them were serious enough in themselves; but quite apart from the actual news contained in them, they brought him

face to face with a number of practical problems which he had known would one day ask for a new solution, but which had till this moment seemed more or less vague and distant. All of a sudden they became close and tangible, and pressed on him as they did so their importunate and painful details.

Returning to Mrs. Schilizzi he discussed their immediate movements. A messenger was despatched to Lichtenbourg, who would go from thence to the Princess, taking a letter to her, and returning that night with an answer: and so soon as arrangements could be made for the proper care of the children, Mrs. Schilizzi would start, by way of Vienna, for England. At first it was assumed that Grenville would travel with her; but suddenly, with a doubtful smile, she said to him—

“Do you think you ought to? Perhaps I am foolishly nervous. I know the world so little, and I never before had occasion to be nervous at all. You must say what is best for me. I trust everything to you.”

“Irma,” he answered earnestly, “I need hardly tell you, for you already are sure enough of it, that except for external circumstances, I would never quit your side. But in this case perhaps it may be best that we go separately—for part of the way at least. Let me think it over by myself, as I put my own things in order. My own things!” he repeated as he prepared to go back to the lodge. “How wretched to think that my things are for a moment separable from yours?”

As soon as he was alone he set himself to consider the situation. With regard to the journey, he judged it best on the whole that he should precede her to Vienna, where he would meet her and her maid, and go from there in the Orient Express to Paris with them. In this way he would avoid meeting the Princess, who, since he had reached Vicenza, had heard nothing of his movements, and who, if she arrived promptly, as she might very possibly do, would be startled at finding him where he was, in close attendance on her niece.

“How much happier”—the thought came like a cloud—“how much happier life would be, were there nothing in it that required concealing! Any one, up till now, would have been welcome to find me anywhere. And yet,” he continued, “we all of us have our burdens. Let me make the best of this one by the way in which I accept its pain.”

Then with a sigh he let these reflections pass, not to leave

him—he knew that well—but to take up their lodgings as guests in some dim chamber of his mind ; and others succeeded them, in certain respects more formidable, but yet of a kind which he faced with a better heart. The latter, but not the former, he recorded carefully in his diary.

“At last,” he wrote, “the test, which I have so often invoked, is going to be applied to me ; and I shall be taught by experience whether all this is inspiration or madness, and what sort of stuff I myself am made of. I have often reflected—not with reference to myself, but merely as a general truth—that a man of imaginative temperament buys his moral furniture cheap. He may decorate his mind, as if it were a spiritual palace, with visions of the loftiest feelings, the tenderest sympathies, the purest principles and acts of complete self-sacrifice ; and connecting himself with these by a certain imaginative process, just as he might connect himself with a character in a poem or novel, he may seem to himself to be a fine and sublime person, when he is in reality selfish, and mean, and heartless.

“And now this comes as a question which I—I, Robert Grenville—must answer. Am I myself a person of this kind ? Most worthy Judge Eternal—I cannot think except by supposing myself before some such judge—if this be so, to what a depth I must have sunk ! For nothing can justify me in my present condition and situation but the fact that I am what I think I am—that I mean my feelings, and shall be true to them not in imagination, but in reality. Do I mean them ? Now comes the time for testing whether I do. And I welcome the test. I am impatient to be applying it, like a man who hits himself to make sure that he is awake. It’s no good my hitting myself, or I might do so at this moment ; but I shouldn’t be a truer lover because I gave myself a black eye. How can I laugh ? I am not laughing really. Let me just state it over again—my whole case as it stands.

“Suddenly, during the last three weeks, that strange catastrophe has befallen me, which when happening in the sphere of religion is commonly called *conversion*. A something which I had always considered as something of secondary value has bewildered me by showing itself as the one treasure in life ; and for the sake of securing this—so I have told my soul—I have already sacrificed much, and am prepared to sacrifice everything. But what I have sacrificed thus far has

been merely certain scruples, which I have indeed respected throughout my life till now, and which I have certainly violated not without a pang; but so long as one's sacrifices are merely at the expense of one's scruples, they can hardly be accepted as much evidence of one's sincerity. I have felt this all the time. Again and again I have said to her, 'What I long to do is to suffer for you.' And my meaning I am sure has been—though I did not at first perhaps understand it fully—that I longed to convince myself of my own absolute sincerity—to convince myself that I was offering her my truth, and not my falsehood.

"Well, sooner than I expected, and more completely than I expected, like a thief in the night, the real trial has come. I see now that if I am genuinely devoted to her, if in any serious and self-denying way I mean to make my life the companion and support of hers, I shall have to sacrifice many things besides scruples. I told her that owing to her I should have to sell my property; and I knew when I said so that this was true. But I thought little—indeed I had hardly time to think—of all that my words meant. I realize what they mean now. I have received a letter informing me that an offer for the whole property has just been made, of a kind unexpectedly liberal. My lawyer tells me that if I am to sell at all, now is my lucky moment; and indeed I can well believe him. Such an offer would probably never be made again. I might have to sell on terms that would leave me a beggar. These will, at all events, make me sure of a competence. I must decide within three weeks.

"Within three weeks!—so soon to part with everything! I feel like a prisoner who hears that to-morrow is the day of his execution. How near it is all coming! And a fortnight ago the entire prospect was different. Then, instead of selling my home, I saw before me the redemption of it. I saw life and honour returning to the old disconsolate rooms. And now it must all go; it must pass away like a shadow—pictures, furniture, everything, with some few exceptions. And why? For the sake of what? Is it not for the sake of a shadow?—a shadow, a dream, a fancy, of which the very memory will soon be unintelligible? If that were the case, I am certain at least of one thing; I should look on myself as a creature beneath even my own contempt. But it is no dream, no shadow, the thing for which I shall make this sacrifice. I

knew it was not. I knew that the feelings within me—the longing, the joy, the worship, the self-devotion—I knew that all these were no mere idle sentiment, but that for better or worse they were part of my genuine self. And now I am about to prove that my self-knowledge was true. Can my love be unreal, if I am deliberately, for her sake, giving so much up? Or can it possibly be selfish if the things I am giving up are the very things by which self would most be flattered? Irma, I am leaving all for you. I am not pitying myself when I say this. On the contrary, I only want to convince myself that I am not quite unworthy of your love for me.

“I talk about leaving *all*. I speak correctly; for I don’t mean my property only. That’s something; but I shall have to leave more than that. At all events, I think I shall; and at all events I am prepared to leave it. It is my own career that I am referring to. That would take me to Constantinople, and part me from her for an indefinite period. Irma, for those who are united as you and I are, there must be no separation such as this. For us, who can be bound together by no outer ties, the inner ties must, for that reason, be all the stronger and closer; and if any of the links wound me, I shall offer the pain to you, as a sort of secret oblation. Irma, what would preachers and respectable people say, if we told them that love like ours was really the asceticism of love, and demanded far more self-denial and self-restraint than any apparent marriage? And yet this would be quite true. Listen! Let me keep as near you as I may, we shall be separated often enough. How often I cannot tell. The difficulties of our future till this morning were mere abstractions to me; and for the first time now they are becoming hard and real. They may prove eventually to be more or fewer than I anticipate; but be they what they may, I promise you this faithfully—there shall never be a day or an hour which I could possibly give to you, and which I will fail to give you an account of what it may cost myself.

“The kind old man who has acted so liberally to me about my marriage, the minister who has taken so friendly an interest in my advancement—to both of these I shall have to explain myself somehow; how I hardly know. I shall have, without the delay of a needless day, to make the authorities aware that they must not reckon on my services. It will be

difficult. There will be difficulties everywhere. And yet, what am I? I am so mad or so inspired—I have so completely lost my reason, or so completely found my soul—that all these difficulties, even whilst they fret and perplex me, and put an end to these weeks stolen from heaven, are at the same time filling me with exultation, and in every pang they inflict are saying to me, ‘You are true to her.’”

He wrote this that morning, before rejoining her at luncheon; and he felt, having done so, more at peace with himself. Of the thoughts he had recorded he said little to her; but she felt in his manner a certain quality which soothed her. He told her the conclusion he had come to with regard to their journey; and though she winced at the idea of leaving him even for a day, she agreed that his plan was wise. In the course of the afternoon she said to him, “If I liked you less I should be more unhappy at parting from you; but the more I know you, the more of you enters into my soul, and will still remain with me, even when you are absent. Listen to me. I trust you. These are three short words; but all that is best and strongest in a woman’s passion is implied in them.”

Late that night the messenger who had been sent to the Princess returned with a letter from her, full of all sorts of kindness. She said however that to come to the hotel in the forest was an adventure beyond her strength, and she begged that, in their mother’s absence, the two children might be sent back to the castle. “In fact,” she added, “unless you telegraph to the contrary, I will meet you at Lichtenbourg to-morrow, in the middle of the day, and receive them straight from your hand, as you are on your way to Vienna.”

“In that case,” said Grenville, “I will be gone by cock-crow. I shall have the start of you by a few hours only. You will reach Vienna at midnight. I will call on you, at your apartments, next morning; and that same afternoon we will start together for Paris.”

They dined that evening at the lodge, without the children. “In thirty-six hours,” she said, “I shall again be with you; but still, since we have been known and belonged to one another, this is our first good-bye. Will you think me doubtful and fretful if I ask you one thing? Are you sure you will be mine always—mine always and in every way, as you are now?” There was a gentle solemnity both in her voice and look which produced the sensation in him of being bound afresh to her—

bound by a new link which was indeed unnecessary, but the added pressure of which he felt and received with gratitude. As he walked back with her to her door, she clung to his arm like a child being taken to school, and about to be parted from its parent. The starlight showed on her cheeks something that gleamed like dew; and as she hid them and dried them on his sleeve, she murmured, "I want never to leave you."

Grenville had to start by four o'clock in the morning. The sinking moon still shone as he dressed himself; but none of the lights of day were yet astir amongst the eastern clouds. The lamps of the carriage he was to travel in were staring with their nocturnal eyes; and he drove off behind the four jangling horses, feeling as if all the world were from henceforward to be night. Knowing that the sight would pain him, he turned to watch the hotel, as a man whose tooth is aching cannot resist touching it; and a desolating sense filled him, that though she would be soon restored to him, the conditions of their perfect union were done with, were lost for ever. The mysterious forests at first saturated with the darkness, and then, as the wan dawn touched them, yielding it up like an exhalation, would at any other time have charmed and aroused his fancy. But now every mile of the road meant to him one thing only—a return from Eden, into the forgotten troubles of life. Lichtenbourg, with its hotels and gardens, as he reached it in the ashy twilight, chilled him with vivid memories of his first days of acquaintance with it. Those days, as he looked back to them now, were coloured with the light of what succeeded them. They were vivid with hope and promise; but they were past, and their promise seemed vain. Horses were changed at the Hôtel Impérial, where he had stayed. The front doors were closed; but his mind through the shuttered glass saw the gleam of a certain brown hat and dress, which had appeared to him on the sunny morning of a day that fluttered with cherry-blossoms. "Irma! Irma!" he constantly muttered to himself as he waited; and then presently the horses were put to, and whatever he muttered further, the bells and the wheels drowned it.

CHAPTER XX.

WHEN he reached the railway-station he experienced another shock. His life of late had been so removed from the world, and had given time such a new and expanded value, that though hardly three weeks ago he had arrived at this very place, a train seemed as strange to him as if he had not seen one for years; and the musty smell breathing from the red plush cushions of his compartment, where the confined air was at once close and chilly, seemed to him like the soul of our common unprofitable life. This journey to Vienna he compared dreamily with his last, when his mind was perplexed with thoughts about Lady Evelyn, stimulated with thoughts of his own brilliant prospects, and troubled—little as he at the time knew it—by her, under whose influence all these prospects were to evaporate. "I can hardly believe," he reflected, "all that has happened to me in a fortnight. All those interests I had meant to live for, and even the very world that holds them, I have already resolved to sacrifice, and am now on my way to do so. I can hardly imagine the value I once set on them. On the other hand, the thing which I value now, and for the sake of which I am renouncing everything else, is a pearl hid in a field which I flattered myself I should never enter."

When he reached Vienna about three in the afternoon, the change which had taken place in himself came home to him yet more vividly. The last time he had been there, and especially the time before, the very air of the streets had been provocative, whispering in his ear ambition. He had felt himself becoming one of the most important figures of Europe, and about to be honoured and welcomed as a part of its most stately life; whilst the pride of blood which underlay his desire of achievement had been stimulated there as it could have been nowhere else. But now all was different. The very reasons which formerly had made the Austrian capital, with all its glitter of to-day and all its traditions of yesterday, seem to him familiar and sympathetic, made it now seem bleak and alien. He felt as if no longer he had either part or lot in it. Under other circumstances, without losing an

hour, he would have gone to the British Embassy to see the Ambassador and his wife; but now, though he thought of them still as two of his best friends, he shrank from the atmosphere which breathed through their bright drawing-rooms. It was once his natural element; he would now move like a ghost in it.

Far more answering to his mood was what he actually did. He went to the offices of the International Sleeping-Car Company and took the necessary places for Paris in next day's Orient Express. In doing this he was conscious of doing something, not for himself only, but also for the woman he was devoted to; and the simple act seemed to be bringing him close to her. He even rejoiced in himself paying for an extra ticket in order that she and her maid might be secure of a compartment to themselves. That business concluded, he rambled through the town like a tourist, and presently bethought himself of going to the Ring or Boulevard, in which her apartment was situated, and taking a look at her windows. This he found, however, was hardly an attainable solace, as there was nothing to tell him which her windows were. They were somewhere or other in a huge block of building, whose frontage was rough with carving and gay with extended awnings, the upper part being devoted to flats or offices, the lower to glittering shops. Mrs. Schilizzi's flat was apparently over the shop of a jeweller, and some of the objects in which were at once so tasteful and splendid that Grenville for a minute or two stood in the street studying them. Whilst thus engaged he was startled by the sound of his own name, pronounced with a charming though very foreign inflection; and looking round he discovered the Countess C——, who had just emerged from the jeweller's swing-doors.

She was full of questions which she gave him no time to answer, and then of invitations, answers to which she demanded; but, finding that Grenville was only a bird of passage, and that he could neither come to her castle in the country nor join her in her box at the opera, she insisted on taking him off that moment for a drive in the Prater. Unwilling to yield, he had yet no excuse for refusing. A huge engine of torture in the shape of a heavy barouche, with two gawky footmen in salmon-coloured stockings, attending it, was there touching the curbstone; and this was presently

bearing him away with the Countess, hardly more willing than Proserpine when she went from the fields of Enna.

Till they reached the Prater *ennui* was his chief suffering, but here *ennui* was lost in a kind of painful interest. As they drove through the crowd of carriages, or paused now and then under the trees, the Countess kept pointing out to him this and that personage, one great as a magnate, one fascinating as a beauty, whom he ought to know, and whom he would know, would he only stay in Vienna. Some of these desirable acquaintances stopped for a moment and spoke to her; and Grenville noticed in men and women both the same charm of manner which had at once attracted him in the Countess. Suddenly a carriage came by, the harness glancing with silver and the servants breasting the air with gold lace and crimson waistcoats. It contained two ladies and a dark-bearded, handsome man.

"Look," said the Countess, "there is the King of Moldavia."

Grenville turned, but it was not the king he looked at. What held his attention was two faces under parasols. Of one he only saw that it was middle-aged, refined, and cynical. The other he recognized by its wonderful velvety eyes—a face now set off by a dress almost insolent in its daintiness. Every one as it passed gave it the homage of a stare. It was the face of Miss Juanita Markham.

"The woman with her," said the Countess, "is the well-known Baroness X—. I suppose you have heard *her* story. Your pretty compatriot is hardly to be congratulated on her friend; and as for the king, they say he is tiring of her already."

All this spectacle, varying, bewildering, brilliant, with a key to it here and there given by the Countess's comments, had for Grenville, no doubt, a degree of interest; but it pained and chilled him in two distinct ways. It made him feel how Mrs. Schilizzi was taking him away from it; and also how *it*, at the moment, was taking him away from Mrs. Schilizzi. His imagination, he felt, was being invaded by a vulgar crowd out of the street, which divided him from her to whom all its domain was consecrated. "Irma! Irma!" he again repeated to himself passionately, but under his breath, and with a due mundane self-repression, so that the Countess, who once actually caught a murmur, concluded that he was merely blowing away a speck of dust from his waistcoat.

At last his trial was over. The Countess dropped him at his hotel. The moment the porter saw him he put into his hand a letter. Grenville received it eagerly, fancying it might be from Mrs. Schilizzi. It was not. It was from the Ambassador, who had somehow heard of his arrival. She begged him to come that night to dinner; there would be no party. He despatched an acceptance, resigned rather than pleased; and, indeed, when the time came he was little less than miserable. His host and hostess talked to him so much of his prospects; and he could not explain that they were now his prospects no longer. He was conscious of their wishes for his success, but their very wishes irritated him. He felt as jealous of any influence that would draw him from Mrs. Schilizzi as he could feel of any that would draw her from him. A strange sensation was dawning on him that his affection for her was, except for herself, making him alone in life—a pariah amongst those who had hitherto formed the world for him. He was not afraid of the situation. It only made him feel how entirely he depended upon her. Wearied with the fatigues of the day, he returned to his hotel early, and was just preparing to close his eyes, and so to abridge the hours which still separated him from her, when the thought suddenly struck him that it might be a help and a pleasure to her if he went to the station and met her on her arrival. To rouse himself now was really a matter of effort; his eyelids were so heavy he could hardly keep them apart. But rouse himself he did, and redressed himself; and driving to the station, he awaited her. As the train came drifting in, he half feared that something would have detained her, and his heart gratuitously embittered itself with a pang of anticipated disappointment. Amongst the dim figures that emerged he soon detected hers, and hastened to her glowing with sudden happiness. With a start of surprise and pleasure, she gave him her hand and looked at him, but the moment after the pleasure gave place to nervousness, and her voice hardening and acquiring a note of petulance, "You shouldn't have come," she said. "Please go away and leave me."

"Can I do," he said, "nothing for you? May not I get you a carriage?"

"No, no," she said, almost turning her back on him. "Good-night; you can call at twelve to-morrow." The next moment he saw her hasten towards a man—a tall, corpulent man,

whose hands glistened with rings, and who, with the aid of his nose, suggested finance and Israel. With her hand on the sleeve of this gentleman's furred overcoat, she quickly disappeared in the direction of the cabs and omnibuses.

Grenville returned to the bed in which he had been about to rest himself, full of a bewildered bitterness which made rest impossible. He could not banish her strange reception of him from his memory. Her voice through the watches of the night kept ringing and echoing in his ears; and hour by hour its tone became harder and more bitter, till her image at last appeared to him, as he lay there half dreaming, like that of a woman who had suddenly grown to hate him, and having ruined his life was going now to spurn it away from her. The misery of this experience was increased by its entire unexpectedness. It staggered him. The elements of his life appeared to him in some new combination like a kaleidoscope shaken by the Furies.

His condition next morning was somewhat calmer; but a sense of estrangement from her remained with him even then, and anxiety branded his forehead with its keen physical pain. But through all this he was famishing for her presence; and it wanted still a good ten minutes to twelve when he was standing at the door of the building in which her apartment was, and rousing the concierge with a peal of the electric bell.

"The first floor," said the man. "The first door on the right."

And Grenville, with trembling hand, was presently again ringing. A white-capped woman with an inquiring look admitted him, and, passing through a lobby in which the carpets were up, he found himself in a large drawing-room overlooking the street. There were no traces of life in it, except that on one of the tables was a pair of gloves and a parasol, both of which he recognized. He looked about him, full of curious interest. The floor was covered with thick red velvet carpet. There were red velvet chairs and sofas, whose woodwork was sumptuously carved, but which suggested the fittings of an hotel rather than of a private dwelling. The walls were papered with staring brown and gold, relieved only by two large mirrors and a life-sized photograph of the Emperor, liberally coloured in oil. Here and there were some fine vases and candelabra, but they seemed arranged for sale rather than ornament; and the only other objects that decor-

ated the shelves and tables were some ormolu trays for cigar-ash, some inlaid cabinets for cigars, and several sets of bottles and glasses for liqueurs, coloured and gilt as gaudily as artists in glass could make them. One thing more he discovered, and one thing only. It was a photograph lying under one of the ormolu ash-trays, faded and ragged, and representing a half-clothed Viennese actress.

Anything more depressing, anything more hopelessly *bourgeois*, it would hardly have been possible to imagine. And this was the home, or at least one of the homes, of the woman to whom he was devoting everything! He thought of the drawing-rooms at the Embassy, and compared them with it. They seemed to belong to two wholly different universes—designed for the lives of people who had not a thought in common. A surprise which he could not analyze at first occupied his mind, and made him forget how the time was passing; but at last it gave place to wonder as to when Mrs. Schilizzi would present herself; and wonder by and by gave place to impatience and resentment.

Of all the troubles of life, the suspense of protracted waiting, with every nerve of doubt, of hope, and of expectant hearing stretched upon the rack, is, in proportion to its real importance, the hardest for some temperaments to bear. Grenville now discovered his own temperament to be one of these; and it is no exaggeration to say that he soon was enduring tortures. Hitherto, though like most men he knew what pain was, he had rarely, if ever, known himself robbed by it of his self-control. Now he found himself at its mercy. Angry, savage thoughts came leaping into his consciousness—creatures till now hidden in the unexplored jungles of his mind, longing to lacerate the woman whose conduct seemed so heartless, and lacerating him meanwhile in their blind fantastic fury. As he stood amongst them he felt like a man amongst a pack of wolves, trying to beat them down, to kill them, or to cow them into silence, and yet strong with a temptation to let them have their way, on the woman and on himself also. Once, one memorable day, he had indeed quarrelled with her before, and thought bitter things of her; but that passed quickly—that he had quite forgotten. And then, only last night, he had experienced pain on her account, of a new kind. But that was pain merely; this was humiliation mixed with pain. He hardly recognized himself.

At last—and it seemed he had been kept on the rack for hours—he heard, or thought he heard, something like a distant rustle. All his senses of a sudden turned into hearing. He held his breath; the noises in the street became audible—carriages, people talking. Then he started; the door burst open; and there before him, her eyes eager with welcome, was the woman for whom he waited.

She looked at him; she came up to him. She was wholly, entirely different from the distorted image which his mind had been just fashioning; but the stress of his late mood was still affecting his muscles, and his voice and look as he greeted her were, against his will, unnatural. Her greeting to him had been what it used to be in the forest, at once gentle and passionate; and it was not for a minute or two that she took note of his change. At last she said, scanning him—

“What’s the matter with you? Are you angry? Have I kept you waiting? Am I late?”

“Oh, no,” he said, smiling in spite of himself, “only three-quarters of an hour.” His words dragged bitterly, and he hesitated. “It wasn’t that,” he went on; “only after your anger last night, I felt rather doubtful if you ever would come at all. I thought, you see, that at the station I might have been some help to you. In fact I got out of bed in the middle of the night to come. You must forgive me for doing unintentionally what roused in you so much resentment.”

For the first time the idea seemed to dawn on her that she had done or said anything which could possibly wound his feelings. A flush came into her cheeks, and a sudden moisture into her eyes, and putting her hands on his shoulders, she whispered, “Dear, forgive me. Come, sit down. We are all alone—forgive me. But, dear, you were indeed imprudent. If he had seen you meeting me at night—well, you know the impression it would have given. Was I unkind or rude to you? I felt so afraid and nervous, I hardly know what I said; and I trusted you so completely, I felt you would understand.”

The trouble was over, and peace had again returned to him.

“In twenty minutes,” she said, “I have told them to bring luncheon. Oh, do look round, and tell me what you think of this place. Will you dislike me when you see the kind of home I belong to? Isn’t it all dreadful, Bobby?” she went on presently. “Doesn’t it tell you a little about what my life

is? Paul thinks it quite splendid. At first I tried to alter it; but it made him perfectly furious. He swore at me. Shall I show you something? Paul did more than swear." She began whilst she spoke to pull up one of her sleeves. "Look at my arm," she said, "a little above my wrist. Do you see the scar on it? Wait, and I will explain its history to you."

She went to a drawer in a cabinet, and brought out an ivory paper-knife. "Paul," she said, "struck me with that because I told him this room was vulgar, and wanted to put away these terrible sets of liqueur things. And then—I see you've been looking at that photograph."

"Who is it?" said Grenville.

She blushed a little, and gave a little faint laugh. "That," she said, "is one of my many rivals. When Paul is in Vienna without me, that lady reigns here. I believe she chose the furniture. Paul supposes I know nothing about her; and this he must have left by accident. He has the oddest notions of respectability so far as I am concerned; and he thinks I ought to be ignorant that bad women exist. Ah!" she exclaimed, sighing, and suddenly changing the subject, not as if it pained but merely repelled and wearied her, "how often when I looked round this prison have I thought of my own home—the shelves crowded with old well-worn books, the faded chintz, and the thread-bare carpets—and our boxes of wooden bricks! I used always," she said, laughing suddenly, "to be building castles on the floor with bricks. Since then, Bobby, I have been driven to build them only in the air. Hark—hark! Gretchen is coming with the luncheon. As soon as we have lunched, you must go; and you must meet me punctually at the train."

When he rose to leave her, she said, hanging her head, "There is something I should like you to see—something I found here in my room. And yet—I don't know—shall I show it to you? It's Paul's photograph. You've seen his friend. Perhaps you had better see him. I will show it you in the train."

He was at the station before her, watching the passengers for the express, as they slowly assembled, and hoping they would all be strangers. He deputed Fritz to wait for Mrs. Schilizzi, to help her maid with the luggage, and to see them settled in their places. Until the train had started, he had

hardly done more than speak to her ; but as soon as they were off, and found themselves surrounded by strangers only, they secured a couple of comfortable chairs in the saloon, and engaged a table for dinner in the restaurant car adjoining. It was five when they started in the mellow and golden afternoon ; and the air from the gardens in the suburbs came with a gust of summer. In half an hour they were nearing meadows and wooded hills, vivid with exuberant green ; and the shining curves of the Danube began to show and hide themselves, here reflecting a sail, here a town or a villa, and here the domes and façade of some palatial monastery. During their dinner they had drifted, not perceiving it, into the night ; and the windows, instead of revealing the moving landscape, did but repeat the light of the lamps in the gilded roof. Mrs. Schilizzi retired with her maid to her own compartment, and Grenville shared his with a pasha and two Roumanians. The following morning, again in the warmth and sunlight, their eyes began to be greeted by lodges and blossoming gardens, and houses with mansard roofs. Then came buildings stretching in long white masses, and tall brick chimneys pricking the clear blue air. The train rattled over points, and they were soon stationary in Paris.

As for the photograph, she had quite forgotten to show it to him. To both of them the journey had been one long idyll ; and they had almost banished from their minds the doubtful sequel it was leading to. But an hour or two later the aspect of things had changed. After a hasty meal, they found themselves at the Gare du Nord, getting what seats they could in the crowded train for Calais. English newspapers were being sold. A variety of vulgar English were pushing and swaggering as only our vulgar can. A man with a cockney twang had a seat next Mrs. Schilizzi, and was solacing himself with sucking cherries, and throwing the stones past her out of the window ; and when presently he began quoting to a friend opposite him the refrain of some song popular at the London music-halls, she and Grenville felt that for a second time they had dropped down out of cloudland, and would have to face and struggle with the squalid difficulties of reality.

CHAPTER XXI.

Mrs. SCHILIZZI was to be met at Charing Cross by her mother-in-law—a lady whose instincts always distrusted beauty, and who, strong in the virtue that comes of having never possessed it, felt herself bound, whenever circumstances admitted, to act towards her daughter-in-law the part of a guardian angel. Her zeal, indeed, was much in excess of that which a well-worn simile ascribes to the angels of tradition; and instead of contenting herself with keeping her charge under her wing, she endeavoured to hold her fast in the grip of her guardian clutches. Grenville gathered this and more from what Mrs. Schilizzi told him. He accordingly parted from her at Dover, taking the train to Victoria, and engaging not to call on her till she wrote to him to give him instructions.

He saw her as he turned away, looking after him through the crowd, which at last hid her; and a puff of briny wind swept between them laden with the smoke and odour of the packet. Having reached London at six, and having slept or tried to sleep for an hour or two, he found himself by twelve washed and brushed and dressed, and, so far as externals went, ready to face the world. But the world that was now around him seemed blanker than the sands of Sahara.

Everything bewildered him. At first he could hardly realize what time of the year it was, or in which of its social stages he might expect London to be. Was the season in full swing, or had he, by chance, lit upon the Whitsuntide holidays? Or was it possibly Easter? These questions presented themselves not because he wished for society, but for a reason precisely opposite. He dreaded the very sight or sound of it. Could he have so arranged it, he would willingly have seen no one till the hour came when he should again see Mrs. Schilizzi. That, however, at the earliest would not be till to-morrow; and meanwhile matters admitting of no delay—matters fraught not with pain only, but with embarrassment, and also with the fate of his whole future life, were calling on him for instant action, and granting him no reprieve. His eyes, as he thought this over, wandered wearily round his sitting-room. Everything had an air of being blighted—even the light that

turned the windows into two staring oblongs. He looked on the wall above his sideboard—an unnatural blank. His favourite painting had gone from it. He looked at a drawing of his home. His home was about to go. In his looking-glass were still sticking a few dusty cards of invitation. One of them bore the name of the then celebrated Lady —, the wife of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Grenville remembered the party it referred to—his last before leaving England—a small and brilliant concert, not a political mob. He remembered his hostess, when he left, coming with him to the door of the room, detaining him there in conversation, and going out with him into the corridor; and he thought of how presently he would be returning to the same house, not to fulfil but to destroy the hopes that were then formed of him.

Here were two people—his lawyer and the Chancellor of the Exchequer—whom he ought to see at once, and for seeing whom he ought then and there to prepare. And also—more formidable still—he would have to communicate with Lord Solway. But he felt unequal to any one of these tasks, or even to the preparation for them. His mind shrank from them with an aversion at once weary and irritable, and wandered away to an unknown suburban villa, till a longing to reach it—a longing which he knew to be futile—threatened to unfit him for any species of exertion. A man's strength of character, however, is shown not in having no weakness, but in conquering it; just as the highest bravery is the conquest, rather than the absence, of fear. And Grenville presently, contemptuous of his subdued condition, pulled together his faculties by a strong effort of will, and forced them to their distasteful duties.

First of all he began to write to the Chancellor, hardly knowing, when he took the pen in his hand, what he was going to say, or what position he should assume. But thoughts, however scattered, are things which, in many cases, need only a severe enough summons to gather them together in an instant. Men often wait idly for their thoughts to inspire their will; whereas what they really need is, that their will should compel their thoughts. Grenville found out this; and presently, to his own surprise, a letter was written which exactly suited the situation. With every phrase of regret which could flatter the person he was addressing, he stated that private matters, which did not admit of explanation,

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would prevent his going, at the time arranged, to Constantinople ; and indeed had rendered his whole plans so uncertain, that he feared he must abandon all claim to the privilege of serving the Government. There was, he added, another competent candidate for the post he was thus renouncing ; and he concluded his letter by saying that his worst regrets were tempered by the knowledge that his loss could be so well supplied.

This letter he at once despatched by messenger ; and he then drove off to his lawyer's. As his cab carried him towards the dim regions of Bloomsbury, he kept saying to himself, "What have I done? Do I realize it?" His head and his eyelids ached, and his eyes were becoming dizzy. But the task he had just accomplished, whatever might be its results, he found had been easy compared to the one now before him. The loss of his career was something vague ; and for the present, at all events, he could contemplate it with dull apathy ; but he was keenly alive to the meaning of this second act of sacrifice. He knew how heavy his hand would feel the pen which would cut him off for ever from the old home of his fathers, and leave him—so he felt—a naked waif in the world. When he entered the dirty passage leading to his lawyer's offices, his sense of all this grew deeper ; and a back parlour in which he was asked to wait, furnished with some jappanned deed-boxes and a couple of old dining-room chairs, seemed to him a condemned cell. He thought of his haunted forest, the lodge, the lake, the starlight ; and then of these surroundings ; and he asked himself if these two sets of things could be both realities ; or, if not, which of them was the dream. The result was that, though his purpose never wavered, he humoured his weakness by postponing the fatal act. He contented himself with examining the details of the offer made, ascertaining afresh the present state of the property, and saying that his decision should be given in a few days. "And yet," he asked himself, when he was once more in the street, "why do I hesitate? I thought just now I was going to sell my home. I forgot myself. A man situated as I am has no home. I must now write to Lord Solway, and explain to him that I shall never have one."

This last was the hardest task of any, not because of the act of renunciation involved in it, but because of the difficulty of assigning for it the smallest reason. Sheets of note-paper

and some pens were still lying on his table; and he was affected by them as a sea-sick man is by the chance sight of food. But again by force of will he compelled his thoughts to his service, and cut a way through obstacles which a moment since seemed insuperable.

He apologized for not having written earlier, to describe the upshot of his meeting with Lady Evelyn at Vicenza. He then explained that, far from having been able to propose to her, he had come to feel doubtful as to whether she even valued his company, and that before he could assure himself as to how matters really stood, her aunt's illness had for the time stopped everything. Here he suddenly paused, wondering how he should proceed. His letter thus far had the merit of being perfectly true; but as to his political career, how could he be equally candid? Lord Solway in that career had taken an almost fatherly interest. Grenville could not palm off on him a mere reference to "private matters," and say that his career was abandoned for indefinite and mysterious reasons. "And yet," he thought, "what is there I can say?" He detested falsehood, and it was impossible even to hint at the truth. At last he wrote as follows—"With regard to my appointment at Constantinople, there is still much to be settled; and it is partly on account of that, that I have returned to London. My confidence alike in your kindness and your profound knowledge of the world, enables me to say to you what another might misinterpret as ungrateful; and this is, that all these affairs of mine, which you have so generously tried to forward, are now in a condition to prosper best by being left to slowly settle themselves, unquestioned and unnoticed. In telling you this," Grenville added after a moment's hesitation, "I need hardly ask you to forgive me."

This letter he sent by post, feeling no special desire to expedite its arrival. He then went out for an hour or two, and avoiding the fashionable quarters, wandered about aimlessly, thinking of Mrs. Schilizzi, whose inaccessible form was painted on a background of unfamiliar wretchedness. At last, compelled by mere physical fatigue, he returned to his own rooms, thinking over what he had accomplished, or almost accomplished, that day—namely, the deliberate surrender of three things, his ambition, his property, and all prospects of a home. A sense of forlornness suddenly settled down on him, through which, indeed, the thought of Mrs.

Schilizzi shone tremulously like a star ; but, like a star, at the moment it seemed hopelessly far away. "When," he exclaimed, "when—when shall I see you again?"

His whole soul seemed to be saying to him, "You have made yourself quite alone in the world." And the same conclusion was presented to him in a homelier and more tangible form, when he thought of the evening that now awaited him so blankly. Should he dine at a club or at a restaurant? Or should he dine anywhere?

In the middle of this perplexity a knock at the door roused him, and Fritz entered with a note. His heart throbbed with a hope that it might be from Mrs. Schilizzi. It was not. It was from Lord Solway. It was an urgent invitation to dinner for that night. He despatched an acceptance. The thought of society was hateful to him ; but still more hateful was the leaden intolerable time, which still lay between him and Mrs. Schilizzi ; and society would assist in abridging it. Whilst he was dressing, a large envelope was presented to him from which he extracted a card for yet another entertainment—a party at the house of the Chancellor of the Exchequer—a card with the flattering words, "To meet their Royal Highnesses," at the top ; and these yet more flattering words, "Very small," at the bottom.

The moment he entered Lord Solway's drawing-room, he saw that the party was one of the most dignified kind. Stately brocades gleamed, and there was a general palpitation of diamonds. No Royalty was present ; but the first person he recognized was a dowager whose well-known features were usually a sign that a king or prince was in the neighbourhood. There was more than one blue riband, and but one unmarried woman—the daughter of a widowed ambassador. Lord Solway shuffled up to Grenville, and welcomed him with a benignant smile, which, despite its benignity to friends, seemed to hint that it could be saturnine to enemies.

"You wrote me," he said, with a sort of hollow chuckle, "a very nice—a very nice, sensible letter. It contained only one thing for which you ought to apologize."

"And what," said Grenville, "was that?"

"Your apology," said Lord Solway. "Come—I must take you to the young lady—I don't know if you know her—whom you are to make happy this evening. Lady ——" he said, pausing before a magnificently dressed widow of sixty, "this

is a young man dying to make your acquaintance. He's come all the way from Vienna to take you in to dinner."

"How silly he is!" said the lady, who blushed and bridled, till one of her chins overlapped her emerald necklace. "I've known Mr. Grenville for years; and I saw him at Vienna a month since. Mr. Grenville, is not Lord Solway silly?"

She was indeed one of the luncheon party which Grenville had encountered at the Embassy; and however absent or dejected he might be at heart, she left him at dinner no time to betray himself. Gossip and scandal, balls, liaisons, and marriages, came from her lips sparkling like a succession of pearls; and she had never showed to greater advantage her talent for two things, which are not perhaps as different as might be thought from the names she gave them—picking people to pieces, and putting two and two together. Want of charity, however, has this advantage over charity, that it sometimes fails at last; and it did so on this occasion. Lady —— found towards the middle of dinner that the characters of all her acquaintance had died a painless death at her hands; so she left them in Grenville's memory, where she knew they would come to life again, and turning to her other neighbour, a widowed duke of seventy, renewed, with a well-preserved archness for which she happened to be celebrated, an attack on his ducal heart, which practice enabled him to resist.

In spite of himself, Grenville was becoming amused. The very look of the table with its piles of splendid plate—presents from crowned heads to a field-marshal, Lord Solway's father—in itself was some distraction. On the other side of him was the one unmarried lady, with the face of five-and-twenty and the happy *aplomb* of forty. Grenville knew her by sight, but he had never made her acquaintance; and he was pleasantly flattered now, when, the moment his widow had discarded him, she met his eyes with a smile, and quickly began a conversation. She seemed quite aware that he had just come from Vienna, and treated his appointment at Constantinople as a matter of public news. She was acquainted with both cities, and talked about both pleasantly, giving her social judgments neatly, like the strokes of an artist's pencil, never laughing at any one, not even the widow near them, but letting it be seen constantly that she could laugh if she chose; and all through this, by some subtle

elusive means, not designedly, but as if by a natural instinct, she contrived to make Grenville conscious of two flattering facts—that she felt him to be an interesting man, and that she knew him to be a distinguished one. The anxiety and the longing for the absent, which was really occupying his mind, began to be overlaid and hidden by a little superficial pleasure; and after a time he felt himself taking note that the speaker's lips were pretty, and that her right cheek had a dimple. But the moment this crossed his mind, with a sudden and painful vividness, another image—other lips and cheeks—hovered before his like an image painted on the air. The first thing that reminded him of the charm of woman's beauty repelled him from the women present, glorifying the woman absent; and, completely for a second or two losing command of his thoughts, he actually found himself murmuring the words, "Irma! Irma!" He turned to his neighbour. She was looking at him. There was no help for it—he lied. "I'm right again now," he said. "I just had a twinge of neuralgia."

After dinner he fell an easier prey to the flattery, merely social, of the elderly great ladies; and one of them, who discovered that he had been asked to the party in Downing Street, offered to take him in her carriage with her. He went. There were many hours that still required killing. Before going to bed he wished to be absolutely tired, or he should not, he knew, get a single hour's repose.

During the drive his whole unhappiness returned to him, yawning again before him like a gulf which some film had hidden, and in the depths of it Mrs. Schilizzi glimmered, unattainable as in a dream. The lighted doors in Downing Street, the red baize and the linkmen, the flower-like figures in the hall making their way to the cloak-room, all seemed to him like the entrance to hell or purgatory; and the party proved an ordeal far worse than the dinner. To the marked notice of Royalty he was not indeed insensible; but it affected his memory as a gift of money might affect some poor woman mourning for the loss of her child; and as for the feminine beauty which was moving on all sides of him, it merely chilled him with a sense of the beauty that was not amongst it. Several women, young, and even there exceptional for their charms, showed themselves delighted to see him, and counted on him returning the feeling. The feeling

was not at his command, but the manner and look proper to it, from mere force of habit, came to his aid and produced themselves; and any one watching him would have thought on two or three occasions that he had fallen a happy victim to the eyes that were then detaining him. Several observers indeed did think so; but no observer could have known that at the very moment when appearances seemed most to warrant such conclusions, the name of an absent woman was still secretly on his lips, and that the touch of a hand not hers on his arm as he went to supper sent through his nerves a shudder as if it had been some pollution.

Thus drew to its close his first day in London. It began as a sombre, and then turned to a sparkling, desolation; and when at last he went to bed, how did it end? It ended with a hope of a certain letter next morning—a hope so intense that it defeated its own ends, and was troubled and made sick by doubt.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE morning came. A few letters were brought to his bedside. For a moment or two he held them in his hands, keeping his eyes closed, and not daring to look at them, he was so perversely fearful of finding that there was none from her. However, there was one. It was merely a hasty scrawl; its wording was curt and almost careless; but it begged him to call on her that morning at twelve. "I have told my mother-in-law," it continued, "that you know Lichtenbourg and its neighbourhood; and she is pleased to consider that as a sufficient explanation of your existence."

In one way he was delighted. He would be with her sooner than he had expected. He had, however, the preceding night promised his host to call at twelve in Downing Street; and there was some awkwardness in postponing so important an engagement. Postpone it he did, however, despatching a messenger with a letter, full of excuses which were not perhaps very accurate. But the messenger had hardly been gone for half an hour when a telegram reached him from her, begging him to come at four. Here was a double annoyance

—first, the dreary interval thus suddenly thrust between him and the time for meeting her, and then a confused sense of that strange feminine selfishness which will allow a woman sometimes to disregard in a man's life every claim or interest not immediately connected with herself. For a moment there blew through his mind a little east wind of reproaches against her ; but this spent itself, and without losing a moment, he hurried off to Downing Street, reaching it before his messenger. He was naturally too early, and passed, as he knew he should have to do, a good half-hour of waiting, which his thoughts made anxious and miserable. He had time to arrange—more time than he wanted—precisely what he should say at the forthcoming interview ; but every moment his considerations were either disturbed or shifted by thoughts of the woman without whom he could hardly breathe. The room in which he found himself was surrounded by rows of blue-books ; and blue-books and Acts of Parliament loaded the solid tables. He took one or two of them, and tried to calm himself by reading them. But through the paper, through the paragraphs and the tabulated figures, would flicker a vision of a brown hat fluttering with feathers, and of cheeks like pale geranium petals. A physical weight seemed to be lying on his chest and smothering him. He could not read ; he could only keep moving about restlessly. He could think of one thing only which would have given him immediate solace ; and that was to tear in pieces a Report on the last census, which he had twice taken up, and opened in the same place, which had maddened him with an intolerable analysis of the occupations of adults in Lancashire. But he heroically resisted this temptation of the devil ; and a secretary at last appeared, who invited him into the sanctum of the minister. The result of the interview was more satisfactory than he had hoped. It settled nothing, and therefore was quickly over ; and he went away made almost buoyant by the news that it would be quite possible, owing to certain recent events, to give him, if he wished it, another two months before he would be obliged to enter on his post or to resign it. The Chancellor also had said to him, "If you are not leaving London immediately, there are one or two matters in which you might be of the greatest help to me ; and I know that the Prime Minister, as well, would be anxious to have some talk with you."

But the pleasurable sense of importance which these last intimations gave him, had long been driven from his mind by very different matters, when at four o'clock he found himself on the heights of Hampstead; and after much inquiry of the way, and many misdirections, his cab stopped at the gate of a large semi-detached villa, which was separated from the road by a walk and a few flower-beds. As he rang the bell a presentiment he was unable to conquer filled his mind that she would not be true to her appointment; and he stood expecting the misery of learning that this was so, and hated the windows that stared at him, and showed him their dull rep curtains. The door was opened by a man-servant, who looked like a dissenting minister; and when Grenville heard from him that Mrs. Schilizzi actually was at home, the evangel that came from such a mouth seemed almost incredible. He entered. He was conscious of some hall-chairs and a barometer, and also of a smell of floor-cloth and distant cooking. He was shown into a drawing-room on the ground-floor, where there were paper flowers in the fire-place, where French polish breathed from the rosewood furniture, and where a flock of antimacassars had settled themselves down like sea-gulls. Grenville looked round him, as one dismayed and curious. There were some large, but not beautiful, pieces of oriental china; some large but hideous mirrors; some pictures in oil of ladies in beaded gowns, and between them some photographs, edged in black, of tombs. On one table were two busts and a tea-caddy; on another a gilt Bible, and a set of ivory chess-men. There was a copy of Scott's poems in a varnished tartan binding; there was a volume of *Texts for the Elect, for every Day in the Year*; and under this some numbers of a well-known financial newspaper. At last, on the chimney-piece, Grenville discovered to his surprise some genuine Greek vases, of extreme beauty and grace, with figures of the Amazons on them, and of some sacrificial procession; but all were masked in petticoats of opaque spotted muslin, in deference—so it seems—to British ideas of decorum. The beauty of the objects themselves, and the charming modesty of their disguise, saved him from the pangs of some moments of expectancy; and he was still beguiled by a sense of unexpected amusement, when an opening door startled him, and Mrs. Schilizzi entered.

He had been secretly annoyed here, even more than he

had been at Vienna, by being forced to connect her with surroundings so grotesquely alien to herself ; but the moment she now appeared the effect of these surroundings was reversed. Her dress, her expression, and her movements, seemed by contrast with the room to possess an added refinement which gave her the aspect of an apparition ; and her nearness to what was vulgar and tasteless showed him how completely she was detached from it. Her eyes were soft with welcome ; her lips eager and parted. But as he approached her he experienced a sudden check. She gave him her hand with a coldness which effectually kept him at a distance. With a quick peremptory frown, "Don't come near me," she said. "You must sit there quite away from me," and then added, half laughing, "There—in that leather chair."

In act he was completely obedient, but his mind was up in arms and rebellious ; and though he still smiled as he spoke, and responded sufficiently to what she said to him, he felt his manner assuming a certain chill formality, which meant, "If you are distant, I can be distant too." As for her, had his judgment been only calm enough, he would have recognized in the tones of her voice, and in the way her eyes followed him, much if not everything that he had hungered for and missed in her greeting. He would have recognized it also in something else, which did as a fact merely annoy him farther ; namely, the sort of subjects to which she managed to confine the conversation. But this perhaps would have required an amount of philosophy beyond the command of any but a lukewarm lover. For not only did she make no allusion whatever to their past, but whenever he tried to do so, she rendered his efforts futile, and kept moving from one indifferent topic to another, like a bird moving among branches that just are out of reach. Unintentionally he helped her in doing so. Hoping in time to change her mood by humouring it, he spoke to her about the Greek vases ; and he really enjoyed sharing with her a momentary laugh about the matter. But she saw in it an avenue of escape, through which she could lead the conversation to other matters similar, and keep it far away from everything to which he wished to bring it.

"I don't know," she said, "what you will think of Mrs. Budden,"

"And who," he asked, "may Mrs. Budden be?"

"Oh," she replied, "my mother-in-law! She married again after Paul's father died. She, you know, was English—as English as any one could be. She was born at Clapham, and belonged to some religious sect there; and this room represents her idea of the beauty of respectable holiness. Everything is an expensive protest against beauty of any other kind. She and Paul's father quarrelled like cat and dog; but, as soon as he died, she began to speak of him as a saint, and she kept those vases there as 'a souvenir of my dear first husband'; though I fancy she enjoys their petticoats partly as a slap at his memory. He brought them from Athens, and they really are very fine."

Grenville caught at these last words, thinking they gave him an opportunity. He raised one of the muslin veils, and examined the vase it covered. "This," he began, "might have inspired Keats with his lines 'On a Grecian Urn.'"

Only a week ago, at such a remark as this, his hearer's eyes would have dwelt on his, full of the thoughts suggested by it. Now she seemed not to notice it, but went on in her former tone.

"Mr. Budden," she said, "who died of a sore throat, which he caught at a meeting for the suppression of dancing on the stage—Won't you listen to me? Why do you frown like that? Don't be cross: let me go on telling you. Mr. Budden was anxious that the vases should be broken to pieces; but my mother-in-law, who resents all suggestions on principle, has often told me how indignant she was at this one; and then when Mr. Budden timidly ventured on another, which was that they should be sent as a present to the British Museum, 'Mr. Budden,' she said, 'I know my own business best. Were they sent to the Museum, their indecorum would be exposed to the public. Here, modestly covered, they at all events can do no mischief; and I can avoid affronting my dear first husband's memory without feeling that I have any sin on my conscience.'"

In the way all this was said there was no trace of unkindness. There seemed to be in her nature a gentleness which left her blows their precision, but checked their force just as they were in the act of striking.

Under other circumstances her anecdotes might have amused and pleased him; but now they jarred on his nerves as flippant,

and as a sign of heartlessness. Here he was, half separated from her, seeing her only in this breathless interval, longing to breathe to her some words of devotion, and to receive from her the comfort of some answer; and her deliberately wasting this short golden opportunity in idle gossip about Greek vases and a mother-in-law, filled him with a bitter and growing sense that he was being trifled with. He made one or two further attempts to force her to speak more seriously; but he made the attempts in vain. She reverted each time to topics more or less trivial; and at last, stung by her treatment, and hardly reflecting on what he did, he rose abruptly and said to her, "I have bored you enough. I must be going."

"Must you?" she said, startled, and looking as if she understood nothing of his mood. "What time is it? It is late. Perhaps you had better go, then."

He had not expected to be taken at his word like this. He stared at her incredulously for a second or two, and then, in a voice which she hardly recognized as his own, "When shall I see you again?" he said. "I will never come again, if you don't wish me to. I will never trouble you more."

"Bobby!" she exclaimed, "what can you be talking of? How silly you are! You had, indeed, better go now, unless you wish to see Mrs. Budden." For the first time, as she looked at him, it struck her that there was pain in his expression. She came close to him, and taking him by both hands, with distress in her own eyes, she said to him, "What is it, dear?"

"I feel," he said, "that you have hardly let me speak to you, and now you turn me away as if I were some chance visitor, and you will not even trouble yourself to tell me when, if ever, I am to see you again."

"Don't," she said, "don't remain any longer so near me. I feel as if all these rosewood chairs had eyes. You can see me to-morrow, I think. I have to go to my lawyer's, and you might take me afterwards to some place where we can have luncheon. I will let you know to-night. Please don't be angry with me, but go."

Half soothed by her parting words and manner, and yet still embittered by the unnatural constraint of the interview, he went out into the maze of suburban roads, and, heavy with a sense of desolation, began to walk towards London. But a week ago—only a week ago—they were in that enchanted

world of forest and lake and solitude, and now, he reflected, how great and how desolating was the difference!

The following day the promised letter arrived, and, having repaired at the hour named in it to the street where her lawyer lived, he waited for half an hour, and she at last came out to him. There was a well-known hotel in the neighbourhood, and they lunched together in the coffee-room. Confidential conversation was, under the circumstances, impossible; but there was something in her manner which spoke to him of her affection as plainly as words could have done, and perhaps more plainly than was prudent. But after luncheon she was obliged to meet her mother-in-law, and they parted without the solace of one single natural moment.

For the next few days they met in the same way. Sometimes she was tender with him, as she had been on this occasion; and not she, but circumstances, were the only objects of his resentment. But just as often she was ill-tempered and absent; her business seemed so to preoccupy her as almost to put him out of her thoughts; and once, when he slightly reproved her for not noticing some personal question, she turned on him, saying, "What is it you ask me? Do you think I came here for the purpose of talking to *you*? You forget that to me this law business is really serious."

On that very occasion he had, in order to meet her, given up an important business engagement of his own, and also a luncheon at which he was to have met the Prime Minister. The next day, what happened was even worse. His conduct with regard to the luncheon had produced considerable awkwardness, and with regard to his business engagement, extreme trouble and inconvenience; and when he met Mrs. Schilizzi, there was a trace of preoccupation in his manner. This seemed to annoy her. She taxed him with being out of temper, and said, "If you don't want to see me, you'd better have stopped away." He explained to her as well as he could what it was that was on his mind. "You know," he added, "the state my affairs are in. I am selling all I have, and must make the best bargain I can. By not keeping my engagement——"

"Well," she said, "what of that?"

He hesitated. "Merely," he said at last, "I shall lose, I think, several hundred pounds. To a poor man like me, this is a real loss. Please forgive me for thinking about it."

She asked him for no particulars; she never said she was

sorry for him. She said only, "Can't you forget it, as long as you're with me."

He tried to do what she asked him, and this interview ended happily; but the memory of it, that night, came back to him clearer than the experience. The wounds she had inflicted on him, hardly noticed by him at the time, began to ache and bleed; and his diary was the reflection of a heart knowing its own bitterness.

"We have," he wrote, "two consciences—a moral and an intellectual one; and I suppose that most men who have not silenced both, are not only accustomed at times to examine their own condition, but to see it in two different lights. Now my moral conscience, in a way which I never should have thought possible, has justified my choice in life; and so till lately did my intellectual conscience also. But my intellectual conscience now is asking me if I am not a fool.

"Irma, what have you done to me, that I should ask myself this question? Here am I deliberately—not in an impulsive moment, but deliberately—preparing, with a careful and painful choice of means, to make myself naked of everything which ordinary wisdom would tell me was best worth my living for. I am throwing into the fire everything for which ambition craves, just as it was being put into my hands. The home of my family, which I might have restored, I am going to sell; and all chances of a home in another sense I am putting voluntarily away from me. And for what? This very morning, before I met her, I was with my man of business, going over the details of the proposed sale of my property, and learning, amongst other things, how by meeting her yesterday I had lost my chance of arranging with a very difficult creditor; and then, when I tell her this—I was obliged to tell her; I should never otherwise have breathed to her a word about it—good God! how does she behave to me? I should have felt less pain if she had stuck a dagger into me. And yet what I wince at is not so much my own pain, as the thought that her nature should make it possible for her to inflict it. She sees that for her sake I am giving up everything; and she might, one would have thought, have guessed without being told that it costs me something at all events to part with my old home. She might even have sympathized with my troubles about money when they were accidentally brought to her notice. But no—I got from her not one word of sympathy. Whatever I

may suffer seems to be absolutely nothing to her, except in so far as I annoy her by letting her see my suffering. How can a woman be like that? I don't know. It's all a puzzle to me. Irma, Irma—are you going to make me hate you? If you could I should be free, and there would be an end of the matter. But I can't hate you—that's the difficulty. Perversely and irrationally my faith in you still sticks to me, though it gives me no comfort; and my love for you puts in your hand the weapons with which you wound me. If I didn't love you, you might be as hard and shallow as you pleased. And yet at times I can plead for you, and make out a case for you, explaining away all your strange behaviour, and showing you to be still unchanged. But then—then—here is the distracting thing:—the moment I have done that, I refute all my own pleadings and represent you to myself as—I can't write down what. Irma, I won't even think of it. I will believe, though I can hardly realize, that you are still the Irma of that far-off lake and forest, who was not ashamed to tell me all her thoughts, or to show me her eyes with tears in them. Yes—I will believe that, even if I cannot feel it.

“But quite apart from all doubts of this kind, how wretched my position seems! As I say, I have given up everything for the companionship of this woman; and with what result? Three-quarters of an hour out of the twenty-four is the most I see of her; and these few minutes are snatched with difficulty, followed by hours of pain, and preceded by hours of anxiety, as if all the time between them were stretched and tortured on a rack. And yet—and yet—if you are not the most contemptible of women, Irma, Irma, I should like to be saying this to you—if you are worth anything to me you are worth everything.”

After he had written this, he read it over again. He paused at one sentence, repeating it half aloud to himself. “Yes,” he said, “it is just that. All my time is being stretched and tortured on a rack. I am wretched until I have seen her. I am still more wretched afterwards.”

Several days went by, and matters did not mend. Indeed, the strain on his nerves became even more intolerable. Each time he met her she would, once or twice at least, look at him with her old expression, and speak to him with her old tenderness; but always in the background there seemed to be some ambushed anger, which would spring out at him suddenly, he

knew not for what reason ; and, worse still than this, when her anger was hushed or absent, and when her eyes were kind, she had an air of preoccupation which he had never noticed in her before ; and when her words replied to him, her thoughts seemed to be wandering. At each successive meeting, from its beginning to its close, he was hoping every moment that she would break through this strange disguise, and show him her true self again—the self he had once known. But he hoped in vain ; and even when she said Good-bye, something rigid remained in the lines of her softening lips.

Painful and perplexing as these interviews were in themselves, their pain was doubled in the memories which they left behind them, and which permeated the hours he was away from her like the virus from some snake's bite. And these hours now formed the great bulk of his life. Some of them were occupied by his own business matters ; some by work in Downing Street ; and for each night he had some dinner or party. But these occupations and engagements left him long intervals of solitude, and he had not the heart himself to seek out any society. Indeed, even had he wished to do so, he would generally have been unable ; for she left him in such uncertainty as to where and when she would see him, that he rarely could make an engagement four hours in advance. He was always returning to his rooms to see if there were any letter from her ; and then, when there was one, which settled their next interview, he vainly tried during the interval to calm himself by walking, wandering away into the suburbs, or into obscure streets ; whilst life was for him like a tree of iron in hell, and his thoughts were like birds who found every twig burn them.

"I used," he wrote in his diary on one of those unhappy days, "I used to think, before all this happened, that I had plenty of self-control ; but I don't know now what's come to me. Certain words from her, even little looks and gestures, wound me, and make me beside myself. My wretchedness now is like the acute wretchedness of a child. All these parties I go to seem like parties of the damned, or some mad show got up to mock me. Through conversation, through music, through everything, I feel the desolation to which she has reduced my life ; and then—I can't help it—I get embittered against her. Sometimes when that happens I am aghast at my own temper, and I wonder if any one ever had

such a devilish heart as mine. All I plead is that when this temper possesses me, I never quite yield to it. I said I was wretched as a child is wretched ; but the difference is, I don't show my wretchedness. Often, when I have felt most violent and vindictive, I have, in order to cure myself, done little acts of kindness which I might not have thought of otherwise. Once when I caught myself—can I write it?—when I caught myself cursing Irma, I helped an old woman—it was on a road near Wimbledon—to lift into a cart some baskets of clothes that had fallen from it. She said, 'God bless you, sir!' I was glad to hear her say that. And then in the street sometimes, when, absorbed in my angry mood, I have refused a penny to a beggar, I have walked back and caught him up, and given him something. The day after Irma had made me most angry, I spent the morning with my old aunt, trying to make things smooth for her ; and I paid some money into her account at her banker's. Oh, Irma, why do you make me so angry—so unworthy of my own self-respect?

"But anyhow, though I see now my own inward weakness, for practical purposes I have been able to conquer it. In spite of the pain which has had its teeth in my heart, I have pleased the Chancellor of the Exchequer with some work I have been able to do for him. He praised me for my clearness and my energy. I have seen the Prime Minister, and he too was complimentary. This is good for me ; because, when I next see Irma, and she treats me like so much dirt, or seems to do so, I am able to bear it better ; for I think I must be still worth something."

Next day, however, his philosophy quite broke down. She asked him to meet her at a shop, and help her to choose a carpet, which was, she said, wanted for her own home at Hampstead. He went. He waited for half an hour in the street, till a group of boys and a policeman all began to stare at him ; and then, when she came, her only greeting was this, "Come in quickly. Don't you know I've no time to spare?" In the shop when she asked his advice, and he did his best to give it, every opinion of his and every suggestion she received as if it were some affront to her ; and when once again they were in the street, she stood scanning the passing vehicles, and said to him sharply, "Well—are you not going to call a hansom?" "Do you want one?" he asked. "What do you suppose?" she answered. "Do you suppose that I'm going to

walk all the way from here to Hampstead?" He called a hansom instantly. In another second it was by the pavement. The promptitude of his action seemed a little to discompose her; but he gave her no excuse for lingering. He politely helped her to enter. He closed the door; gave the man the directions; raised his hat to her, turned on his heel, and went. That evening his diary was very brief. It was simply, "This can't go on. Unless she changes, I must leave her. There's nothing else to be done. Irma, I must say good-bye to you."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE following morning he could hardly believe his eyes. Having lain awake half that night, he had finally overslept himself; and the moment he woke, a letter was put into his hands. It was from her. "To-morrow," she wrote, "my mother-in-law will be away for the entire afternoon. Call for me here at two, and we will go to my own house. I have several things to attend to, and I want you to see the place. Was I cross yesterday? You were."

This invitation, though its closing words annoyed him, came to Grenville like summer returned in winter. The pain at his heart ceased, like noise giving place to silence. It is true that when she met him in Mrs. Budden's drawing-room, she still treated him with a certain superficial coldness; but it was a coldness which her eyes belied. She had on her hat and gloves, prepared to go out at once; and her cheeks were bright by contrast with the same brown dress which she wore on the day of the first expedition she had made with him. All the air of Lichtenbourg seemed clinging to its folds like a perfume.

"We will walk," she said. "It is the other side of the Heath. Come: I am quite ready. Let us be out of this dreadful room. As I told you the other day, my mother-in-law and all Paul's family seem to be staring at me out of these rosewood chairs." They were soon outside. "Do be careful," she said. "Walk not too near me. We can't tell who may be looking."

Before long, however, they were out of the region of streets, and had taken a path over the broken and furze-grown heath ; and now, as she felt they were more securely alone together, her own natural manner, which Grenville had almost forgotten, came back to her.

"Irma," he said, "do you know how I feel now? I feel as if you had been dead, and had suddenly come to life again."

"Indeed," she replied, "I have been living under conditions that well might kill me." Her look and manner both showed that she understood him ; but they left him sore with a sense that her sympathy was inadequate to his pain. "There," she said presently, "there is our house beyond those pine-trees."

It was a large house in a garden full of foliage, with a gleaming conservatory on one side, and stables and out-buildings on the other. The drive and the flower-beds were kept with exquisite neatness ; the steps that led to the entrance were as white as a clean table-cloth. Everything suggested the aggressive neatness of a man who can think himself a gentleman only when his clothes are new. Indoors Grenville received the same impression. The floors were scrupulously polished ; the walls smelt of paint and gilding ; but at the same time he was astonished by the quality of the objects that surrounded him. There was in the hall a magnificent Italian coffer, and a huge picture, which purported to be a Rubens, and which, if not an original, was at all events a splendid copy. There were fine Florentine chairs, and a large Venetian mirror ; and glass doors on one side opened into the conservatory, which was glowing with tropical vegetation. The reception rooms were just what the hall might have led one to expect. The ceilings were gaudy with Parisian clouds and cupids ; there was abundance of modern furniture, which had been bought at an exhibition ; some Sèvres and Chelsea china ; some marketable modern pictures ; and placed about under glass cases, some cameos, some crystal goblets, and other objects similar. Though none of these individually was first-rate, nothing was bad ; but the effect of the whole was frightful. It represented a life altogether at variance with whatever beauty the individual things possessed. They all took a tone from the large shining tables, on which photographic albums were arranged in pyramids, and from

the carpet, rich in pile, but monstrous in design and colour, whose crude vulgarity made a staring ground for everything.

Grenville tried to keep his impression of the room to himself, and merely said, "What a fine collection you have here!"

"Paul," she replied, "says that there isn't a saucer that wouldn't fetch now at Christie's more than the price he paid for it. Come—I will show you *his* room."

This was full of floridly carved walnut furniture, much resembling that of the apartment at Vienna; and the whole was somewhat suggestive of the interior of a Pulman car. On the thick hearthrug was an electroplated spittoon. There were some shelves designed for books, but used for boxes of cigars; and art was represented by some coloured prints of race-horses.

"You won't," said Mrs. Schilizzi, "find the portrait of any actress here. Paul is afraid of his mother, whose eyes are as quick as arrows. She tolerates those horses only under severe protest; and she takes him to church with her every Sunday twice. Oddly enough, in England he thinks she is quite right; and for this reason he prefers living abroad."

"What a home," thought Grenville, "for such a woman as this!" It bore the same relation to the homes with which he was familiar, that a school-boy's nonsense verses might bear to a passage from Virgil—composed of the same materials, but differing in having no meaning.

At last, however, a door was opened, passing through which he felt himself in another world. Here was a room, chill indeed with the tidiness that comes of being not occupied, but full of all the signs of delicate and refined life. The chairs were covered with old-fashioned flowered chintz; there were books in profusion, bound, not expensively, but with all the careful taste of one who evidently loved them. Over the chimney-piece were a few Chelsea figures; and on each side of the mirror were some cases of old miniatures.

"I have told the housekeeper," she said, "to let us have tea here. We can be quiet here for a little; and for a little while I can be myself again. How horrid and how strange you must have thought me these last days! Bobby," she went on, "this room means to me an entire lifetime. All these things were mine before I married; and it was here

that I first grew at home with pain. And yet, compared with the other rooms in this house, I look back on it as a refuge. I could be alone here—away from that dreadful drawing-room. Do you see this carpet, how old and shabby and worn it is? I had it in my room at home. Paul was in such a rage with me because I wished to keep it. These old things of mine seemed often my only friends.”

He began to look at her books, at her pieces of china, and her miniatures. She went round the room with him, standing by him and explaining everything. He saw the volumes she had valued most when a child, with the blots and pictures she had made on margins and title-pages. She pointed out to him her mother’s miniature and her father’s; and all the affection and purity which had brooded over her childhood seemed to spread its wings over both of them and fold them in a common shelter.

“Irma,” he said at last, “if only I could keep you always!”

She made no direct answer, but starting as if at a sudden thought, “Wait a minute,” she said, and moved away towards a drawer. “Do you remember I told you at Vienna that I would show you something? Well, I couldn’t find it, and you forgot to ask me about it. Here’s what will do as well. See—this is Paul’s photograph.”

Grenville took it. He stared at it. The features were not new to him. They were those of the lover who had been his companion in the train. He examined it carefully to make himself quite sure; and for reasons which at the moment he had not time to analyze, he felt as if some unknown weight had been lifted from his heart, or had been lightened. She had turned away from him when he took it, so noticed nothing of his expression. His first impulse had been to tell her of his recognition, but he stopped himself; and he returned the picture to her, saying merely, “One day I must tell you something.”

She looked at him shyly, without asking his meaning.

“It is late,” she said. “It is time for me to be going. You must leave me here. You must on no account walk back with me.”

“Tell me,” he rejoined, “when shall I see you to-morrow?”

“Ah!” she exclaimed, “I wanted to talk to you about that. To-morrow I am quite free; Mrs. Budden is going into the country; but the day after I am going into the country

myself. That day is Saturday, and I must stay away till Tuesday."

An exclamation of displeasure involuntarily escaped from Grenville.

"Don't be angry," she said; "why should you be so hasty? You can come with me if you like. That was what I was waiting to tell you. I am going to a little sea-side place in Suffolk, to be for a day or two with a child of one of my sisters."

Grenville's expression underwent an immediate change. Happiness was filling his mind like water surging into a lock.

"Of course I will come," he said. "But about to-morrow—listen. I have seen *your* home to-day. Will you come with me and see mine to-morrow? I am going to visit it, perhaps for the last time. It is," he went on, "only thirty miles from London." And he mentioned the railway by which to reach it, and also a convenient train. At first the expedition struck her as impossible. The fear of her mother-in-law seemed to paralyze her powers of movement; but the longing to come with him, growing as she thought over the project, presently showed her the means of absenting herself without offence.

At the appointed hour they met at Waterloo Bridge, and an hour's rapid travelling brought them to a Hampshire station, situated in a region of fir woods and wild commons. The dusty road, along which they were soon driving, was bordered with trees which made a flickering shade. Yellow gorse glittered; red-roofed cottages sunned themselves; and the signs of old-world inns swung by the broad footpath. The whole landscape was full of that singular primitiveness to be found in so many places that are almost within sight of London; and Mrs. Schilizzi was at once surprised and delighted at it.—At length they reached a wide undulating heath, tufted with gorse and heather, and surrounded by zones of woodland, where white glimpses of several important houses showed in the distance, shimmering through the haze of trees. In the middle of this heath, at the beginning of an abrupt ascent, Grenville stopped the driver, and proposed to his companion that they should walk. He took her by a footpath up the slope through the gorse-bushes; and the moment she reached the summit she stopped short with an exclamation. For there, on a slope beyond, backed by blue

fir woods, and fronted by grass and fern, a forest of twisted chimney-stacks rose from a dim red pile, whose magnitude was at once apparent from the number of its mullioned windows. Domed turrets in the garden, steps and balustrades, were visible. An avenue of elms climbed the slope to the house; and hardly a furlong from where they stood were the lodge-gates giving access to it.

"And is that your home?" exclaimed Mrs. Schilizzi. "How beautiful!" The words were ordinary enough; but there was a sort of sob in her utterance of them, full of thoughts and feelings which she was unable to speak. "And am I depriving you of this?" Such was its general meaning. Grenville knew that it was so, but affected to be otherwise occupied; and when he spoke he forced his tone to be cheerful. "Do you see this?" he said, as he pulled a parcel from his pocket.

"Yes," she replied. "What is it?"

And as she looked and spoke, he saw that a tear fell from her cheek upon her glove. He showed her, with a laugh, a false beard and whiskers.

"I don't," he said, "want to be recognized—in case there should be any one to recognize me. I want to go as a stranger, and I have an order to view, which will admit us. Look—are the things on properly? I wore them at some private theatricals; and my oldest friends said that they would never have recognized me. Tell me—do you think you would?"

She assured him his disguise was sufficient, and not altogether unbecoming; and they went together up the avenue. It was evident that the place received a certain amount of attention; but signs of neglect and dilapidation might be nevertheless traced everywhere. There was a sheet of water covered with green weed; there were fences ill-mended, and clumps of trees and shrubs killing each other for want of pruning. At last came the iron gates, just outside the house. Half their scroll-work was eaten away by rust. They passed through these into a great gravelled enclosure, and made their way towards the lofty windowed walls, which the down-drawn blinds covered with blots of whiteness.

"My tenants," said Grenville, "I know are away now. I shall pass for a stranger—for an intending purchaser. I couldn't have borne to be seen in my true character. Everything here has for me some memory—every door—every

window—even that kennel there, where our old dog Ponto lived.”

An echoing peal of the bell had meanwhile summoned a servant; and in the course of a few minutes they were making their tour of the house. On the principal floor, reached by a wide oak staircase, was a magnificent suite of rooms, hung with tapestry, and leading into a long gallery, full of old chests, and spinning-wheels, and the boots and breast-plates of cavaliers. The dark boards, with some scraps of faded matting on them, were here uneven with age, and the air was pungent with an incense-like smell of dust. To Mrs. Schilizzi the whole place was a revelation; and her breathless appreciation of it beguiled Grenville of his melancholy.

“We never,” he said in French to her, “used this part of the house. We could hardly afford even to have it swept. Our quarters,” he continued, when they descended to the floor below, “our quarters were here, looking out on the garden.” And the servant, as he spoke, admitted them to a good-sized drawing-room, hung with portraits, and surrounded with dim gilt tables. On one of these portraits Grenville fixed his eyes, and then said hastily to the servant, “Pray open the dining-room—and the library too, and the boudoir. I know the house—I shall have to see all of them.”

The man went; and as soon as they were left alone, “Irma,” said Grenville, “that picture is my mother. That is my little sister. They are both dead. Do you see this marble table, with a pack of cards inlaid in it? My mother was sitting by it, her head resting on her hand, the only time I ever said an unkind word to her. I was only fifteen then. I remember to this day the line of pain that quivered at the corners of her closed mouth. Everything speaks to me here. Don’t think me a fool. I hope that man’s not coming. I shall be too blind to see him.”

His face was averted. He looked as if he were staring at the wall; but a moment later he turned to her, first biting his lip, then forcing a laugh; and there was nothing left in his eyes betraying a want of fortitude. Afterwards they went into the garden, and then through portions of the park. He pointed out to her the bark of a youngish beech-tree, on which some letters were cut, distorted by the rind’s growth. They were still legible; and they spelt, “Robert Grenville.”

"Come," at last he said to her, "come—we have seen all. When my mother and my sister died, I was fonder of this place than of anything."

"And now," she said, "for the sake of a worthless woman, you are going to rob yourself of all that was most dear to you."

"No," he replied; "a woman has revealed to me something that is dearer."

At a convenient spot he freed himself of his slight disguise. They rejoined their carriage, and the train was hurrying them soon to London.

Her manner now had a tenderness he had never known in it before. In the earlier days of their relationship her being had clung to his. It now seemed to him brooding compassionately over it. Poetry and prose come into strange contact. Signs and advertisements on each side of the line showed them they were nearing London, and roused her from a long silence.

"You," she said, "who are sacrificing so much for me—do you know what I should say to you if I had the courage? I should say to you, Do not complete the sacrifice. As it is, I can say only, Let me do my all to repay you for it. And that all is so little. I never knew till to-day how much you really cared for me. This has been a day of happiness; and also a day of trouble."

"Well," he answered, "trouble is to love what night is to a star."

"Vauxhall!" shouted a voice outside. "Tickets ready—all tickets."

They both laughed at this interruption, and their parting at the terminus had peace in it—a peace which was disturbed only by throbbing anticipations of to-morrow. As for him, he all that night dreamed of the station at Liverpool Street, which was to be the scene of their next meeting; and each time he awoke, as he often did restless from expectancy, the darkness of the future was illuminated by an *Aurora Borealis* of hope. But doubts still annoyed him as to whether hope would fulfil itself, till he actually saw her dress glimmering amongst the crowd on the platform; and he found himself gliding away with her from under the station arches, leaving London behind them for the hush of the Suffolk shores.

But now he was secure of her. The melancholy of yesterday, the anxieties and jarring incidents of the days preceding, gave

to them a feeling of exultation, as if they were escaping from some house of bondage; and as for the sacrifice which had so lately saddened both of them, he had forgotten he had to make, she, that she had to accept it.

The watering-place they were bound for was little more than a fishing-village, with some villas, an hotel, and a terrace of lodging-houses annexed to it; and though in its season Cockneys swarmed like flies there, now it was full of its own local silence. Two musty cabs, however, were waiting patiently at the station, whose drivers appeared even more surprised than pleased when two well-dressed strangers appeared and engaged both of them.

Mrs. Schilizzi was to stay in lodgings that had been engaged by her sister. Grenville had, by telegraph, ordered rooms in the hotel. The two abodes were not very far apart. They both looked on a wind-swept down or common, fringing which was the beach and the shining sea. On this common they had arranged to meet in an hour; and Grenville saw at a glance that there would be no chance of their missing each other. They met. After the jars and noises of London, and the painful and precarious interviews which, straining the nerves of each and trying the tempers, still left smarting traces of the pain that had been thus inflicted, the intense peacefulness which now surrounded them lay on their ears like velvet, and found its way into their souls. The only sounds heard were intermittent and isolated—the occasional rattle of some solitary cart or van, or of one little yellow omnibus with the packages of some commercial traveller, the voices of a child or two playing, or of one man calling to another by name, or the plunge of the waves which, long and slow and shining, curved into foam and fell on the shingle not far away. She took his arm, confidently, with a frank temerity, and they went towards the beach, over the thin pale-coloured grass, crushing with their feet as they did so many a drifted shell. Scents of the sea moved and floated in the air, and their hearts were filled to overflowing with a deep tumultuous tranquillity. They sat on the shore; played with the pebbles and threw them; and watched the dove-coloured clouds change their shapes on the horizon, and catch the gleams of sunset.

“To-morrow,” she said to him, “we will manage to dine together. This evening at six I must have tea with my little

niece. You can dine meanwhile, and take me out again afterwards."

At a little distance was an old wooden pier, dilapidated, and looking like the ribs of some wrecked vessel. An hour or two later they walked to it, when it looked black in the moonlight, and they sat together almost silent on one of its crazy benches. The tide was full. There was a hush on the breathless waters; and in Grenville's heart was the hush and fulness of the tide. At last he felt her his own again, as she had been in the Hungarian forest. All his doubts and pains and desolating exasperation faded out of his memory, and became things unbelievable. They only had this effect, that she was dearer to him now than ever. For some time they spoke only in those broken syllables which if written down seem so silly or unmeaning, but which are for lovers signs of a silent eloquence, like ripples that break at intervals on a current of noiseless waters. But at last Grenville roused himself, and with an effort changing his manner, began to address her with a distinct and deliberate utterance, which might to a passing listener have sounded entirely commonplace. At first she looked at him, puzzled; but she soon understood his meaning.

"I wish," he said, "but I don't wish it from vanity, that you would think over various merits which I venture to think myself possessed of. In many ways I'm an excellent man of business. I can grasp a legal point almost as quickly as a solicitor. I could at this moment go into many a city office, and amend the details of many a financial scheme. I have a keen sense of the ridiculous. I'm a seasoned man of the world; and no one has known better than I how to value the world's advantages. But you—I am not in the least exaggerating—have transmuted the world for me like an alchemist. You have turned my estimate of things entirely topsy-turvy. What I would tell you, if I could, in the most passionate language of poetry, I can tell you also in the baldest and most matter-of-fact prose. My devotion to you is so real, and goes so through my whole life, that it would bear being expressed in an affidavit quite as well as in a poem. Nero wished that the populace had only one throat, that he might cut it. All the things I value have only one pair of eyes; and they are close to me—I see them shining now. Irma," he continued, "my heart is like a cathedral, where a

lamp is always burning in your honour, and where sometimes in your honour there is nothing but solemn silence, sometimes the murmur of some new act of devotion. Tell me, do my words reach you so as to make you feel them ; or are they like a jet of water from a fire-engine too far off, which breaks into spray before it strikes what it is aimed at ?”

“Don’t,” she exclaimed, “don’t. Your words not only strike, but penetrate ; and my heart is so full of what they mean, and so jealous of losing it, that——what shall I say ? Dear, I can hardly bear it. I am rather sad to-night. I will tell you why to-morrow.”

To-morrow came ; but the promise was not at once fulfilled. In the morning she was sad no longer. She was buoyed up on the tide of a triumphant happiness against which she could not struggle ; and the horizon of the day before her was like that of a summer sea, which met heaven and hid all the world beyond. Some hours she devoted to her little niece, doing for her all that could be done by the kindest mother ; but every minute not thus occupied she spent with Grenville, full of a simple-hearted happiness which trouble dared not sully. But towards the evening her sadness returned again. They were sitting on the beach, watching some distant sails. Suddenly she said to him—“To-day you’ve been very good to me. You’ve not been angry with me because I’ve given so many hours to my niece ; and yet I am sure it tried you. But you knew it was my duty ; and you never once looked cross at me. I am so touched, dear, by all these little forbearances. And yet—oh, Bobby, Bobby, there is something I want to say to you. I wanted to say it last night, only I hardly knew how ; and all to-day I’ve not wanted to say it at all.”

“What is it ?” he asked. She hesitated and blushed. She began to speak, and then stopped herself. What was in her mind Grenville could not conjecture ; but one thing came better to his view than ever it had done before—the fact that for him she was guilelessly and defencelessly truthful. There was something almost painful in the degree to which this touched him—in the new and sudden call which it made on his care and tenderness. “What is it ?” he asked again. “Tell me. I shall understand, whatever it is.”

“Yes,” she said ; “I indeed believe you will. You understand me too well ; and it—you are too good to me. I think I can tell you now. You see, Bobby, my loving you—you see

sometimes it is mere happiness, just as it's been to-day ; and then at other times it overwhelms me and lifts me like a religion. It was like that last night, and it's so again now. Well, this is what I feel—if we weren't in a public place, I should like as I told you to hide my eyes on your shoulder—I feel that the higher and purer my love gets, it raises some standard in me by which I condemn myself ; or at any rate, it makes doubts trouble me which in more careless moods I can answer. Don't be angry with me. I blame myself, not you."

"I myself," he said, "am not free from trouble. When I put before myself our position in general terms, often and often I condemn it ; but when I think of it as it really is, and when I think of you as a part of it, let me say what I may to myself, it is redeemed, and my blame falls powerless on it. But oh, Irma, I ought to tell you this : If you don't agree with me naturally I don't want—how difficult it is to put some things—I don't want to cajole you with what your conscience may resent as sophisms."

"Dear," she said, "I did not mean to distress you. I believe at heart I feel exactly as you do ; but my doubts will come at times, and I like to tell you everything. But this evening, Bobby, they have come, not, I think, on their own account, but merely because my spirits are getting a little low again. I have a sort of presentiment that something bad will happen to-morrow ; and even if it doesn't, to-morrow is our last day here. The day after I shall have finished my business ; and then I shall have to leave you and hurry back to my children. To leave you—that will be sad enough ; but not even for your sake would I stay away from my children. Perhaps if they were here I should have none of these morbid fancies."

"Irma !" said Grenville, "what have you just been saying ? Do you suppose that when you go I shall not go also ? So long as your welfare will not suffer by it, and so long as you will allow me, I mean never to leave you ; whilst as to your children—I should hardly believe I had any place in your heart if that place in some ways were not subordinate to theirs. And now," he went on, "there is something more—I have never yet mentioned it to you ; indeed, I only knew it a day or two ago—which I want to tell you. It has made to me a considerable difference since I knew it."

"Yes?" she gasped. "Is it anything very dreadful?"

"You remember," he answered, "that at your house the other day you showed me a certain photograph. Well—I recognized it. I have already met the original. I travelled with him from Paris to Vienna before my visit to the Princess. I talked to him. Listen, I will explain to you all about it."

"Are you sure it was he?" she interposed. "Was he alone? I believe he very rarely is."

"He was alone in the train; but somebody was with him on the platform. He told me who she was. He was very frank and communicative. You, I dare say, will know what I mean by that. I don't want to dwell on it, but I want to tell you that since I made this discovery, the chief uneasiness that lurked in my mind is gone. I only knew it was there by the relief it has given me by going. I am appropriating nothing that he either understands or values. I always felt that this was so; but only now has it been proved to me. Can't you see with me what a difference this must make?"

She looked him long in the face; and at last, turning away, "I am glad," she said, "of this. It makes me also happier. You now see what my position is, and how completely, except for you, I am alone. Please don't fret about me. My heart has been lightened as yours has been. I am happy. I am alone no longer."

Nor next day was the state of her mind changed. The thought that this peaceful interval would so soon come to an end did, indeed, sadden both of them; but it was a sadness brooding over peace, like clouds over a quiet sea. The mid day post, however, brought her a letter from London, bearing many stamps on it, and darkened with re-directions. "It is something from Paul!" she exclaimed. Her cheeks flushed as she read it. "His work at Smyrna is nearly done," she said presently, "and—what is this? There are some new waterworks at Bucharest, for which the firm has a contract. He will be going there in three weeks. He supposes that I and the children are at Vienna or with the Princess; and as soon as he is able to do so, he will come to us."

She dropped the letter on her lap, and looked at Grenville silently. "Of course," she said at last, "it must have happened sooner or later; but sometimes, Bobby, sometimes one forgets things."

"If you," he replied, "are as serious as I am, we both of us have to face a difficult and painful situation. I have known this all along; still, when such a thing comes close, of course at first one shudders at it. But even if our path grows stony, do not the less lean on me."

As he spoke her smile again came back to her, but she acknowledged his words solely by a single glance of gratitude. He felt that this gave him a new insight into her character. He felt that many things in her behaviour, many little cases of what seemed neglect and carelessness, were due not to any want of recognition on her part, but to a foregone conclusion that he would take her recognition for granted. And so through all that day, though a certain sadness filled it, a happiness reigned which the sadness only deepened. They arranged to dine late, so as to catch the last glow of the evening; and again they sat on the shore together, playing with the pebbles and the sea-weed, and watching the waves fall. Everything on which their eyes rested was steeped in a pathetic beauty, which did not come from the sunset, though that indeed was beautiful, but which comes at any hour to things seen for the last time. She had been repeating some random fragments of poetry. Once or twice she had quoted a line wrong, and he had laughed at her. Certain sorts of ridicule are more tender than a caress. For one verse especially he insisted on finding fault with her. It was an English verse of eight syllables, and ought to have run thus—

"See, on the shore, the waters fall."

She, however, turned waters into "waves," and he tried to convince her how halting she made the metre. Presently a thought struck him.

"See, on the shore, the waves fall!"

he repeated. "Do you know, in itself that metre is musical. I can't tell why, but my thoughts at this moment are in tune with it. Irma, be quiet a moment, and I will set them to the music of your mistake." He borrowed a pencil of her, and the back of an envelope; and now murmuring to himself, and now writing, he was occupied whilst she watched him. "Listen to this," he said at last; and he looked up at her seriously.

She leaned her hand on his shoulder, and watched his hasty scribbling, as he read—

“See, in the west the day fails ;
Low on the sands the waves sound ;
Slow on the down the lean sails
Of the mill drift round.

See, in the west is one star !
See, a day we have found fair
Is leaving the things that still are
For the things that once were.

Hold me fast by your true hand ;
Turn away from the changed sea.
Our day forsakes the forlorn land ;
Never forsake *me* ! ”

CHAPTER XXIV.

Two days later Grenville's diary ran thus—“She is gone, and I am left solitary. For a week longer I am obliged to remain in London, to complete the sale of my property ; and I shall then follow her. As for my property, the bitterness of death is past. Not yet legally, but still, so far as I am concerned, finally, that matter is settled. My family is come to an end. It has no home and no future. The place is to be bought as it stands—pictures, furniture and all. I have been allowed to reserve nothing but the portraits of my mother and my sister, and a few miniatures. The ostensible purchaser is not the real purchaser ; and who the latter is I do not know, and why should I care ? The terms are such as will enable me to live without begging. My lawyer tells me I am getting a fancy price. So be it. I have chosen my lot in life, but as yet I am not used to it. At present I feel like a man who has lost his teeth, and whose mouth is still strange to him ; or like a man whose leg has been amputated, and who still feels it aching. There is a gap, there is an aching, everywhere.

“If Lady Ashford could read this diary, which was begun at her suggestion, what a triumph it would be to her ! I

could bear her laughing at me. I could bear to confess to her that she was right, and that I have found my fate as she said I should. And yet once or twice, though I hardly like to put it in writing, this doubt has occurred to me—I have asked myself whether one fine morning I shall not wake up and find that all this conduct of mine has been that of a drunken man who has half undressed himself in the street, and made himself for ever a laughing-stock to himself and his friends also. Yes—I have asked myself this; but the answer is instant and unvarying—that I am not like such a drunken man, but that I see and think clearly; and that the treasure which I am now deliberately choosing is for me as a human soul, worth more than anything which I give up for it. A week ago, though I should have said the same thing, I might not perhaps have been able to say it with so much courage. Then I was being torn by doubts, and was almost mad with anxiety; but these few days by the sea have set all my doubts to rest. Distance may sometimes separate us, but bitterness or doubt, never.

“No—in choosing my lot I am not drunk. Unlike the lover, to whom love is a foolish intoxication, it has not even robbed me of my ordinary cool prudence, or even rendered me selfish. For those few persons who depend on me, I have taken care that all due provision shall be made. As for myself, I shall, when my poor aunt dies, be rather better off than I have been; and I shall for the present be a little, but not much, poorer. I shall make up for that by leaving these rooms next autumn, and taking some that are cheaper. Six weeks ago, my prospects were somewhat different. I had then before me visions of big houses, and servants, and all the life that goes with them. Yes—yes—I know quite well what I am losing. No miser, unwillingly counting over his coins as he pays them, knows better.

“Let that go. But, Irma, now I must turn to you, and confess to you, who have been so guilelessly truthful to me, about another trouble which I still have to reckon with, but which I can reckon with better than I could a week ago. I am sad without you; but my complete trust in you gives to this sadness a sort of cloistral quiet, in which I continually think our situation over. I fancy, as I do this, that I consist of four persons—myself as jury, myself as prisoner, and two counsel, who are respectively prosecuting and defending me.

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The one attacks me as depraved, mean, and wicked ; the other takes up every point in order, considers it curiously and fairly, and disposes of it. The attacking party—the counsel for the prosecution—is extremely furious and voluble ; and there are two qualities in his rhetoric that at first intimidated me. He laid down all his propositions as if no one could question them ; and no doubt they were all of them propositions I had heard before. He said, ‘ You are ruining the happiness of a home ; you are betraying a friend ; you are wronging a man who has trusted you, and who has never injured you.’ And he went on in this way till he was out of breath. He had no need to think, for his phrases were supplied him by newspapers. Then the other began, taking every point in order. ‘ Ruining the happiness of a home !’ he exclaimed. ‘ What does that mean ? The home in question had none of that happiness which the conduct now in question could ruin. Weak indeed must be the case of a prosecution, when one of its most formidable arguments rests upon something which is, in this case, a mere conventional fiction—some Richard Roe or some John Doe of morality. If the happiness of a home has been here affected in any way, it has been rather repaired than ruined. Betraying a friend !’ the counsel for the defence continues. ‘ Here is another fiction—not a fiction in some cases, but a fiction here ; and yet always assumed conventionally, whether true or not.’ And then the counsel says, turning to me in my capacity of jury—‘ The arguments we have just been listening to pretend to be those of the conscience. They illustrate a fact I have very often suspected, namely, that much which passes for conscience, or a man’s own inmost voice, is not what it seems to be. It is not what he says about himself—he who knows all the circumstances ; but what he thinks other people would say, who could never know but a part of them, and that part the least important. It is not the voice of your own judgment on yourself, but your hypothetical anticipation of how other people would misjudge you.’ In many cases I am convinced that this is absolutely true. The counsel for the prosecution is more furious than ever. He drops the tone of argument, adopts that of a sermon, and quotes various phrases which either have no meaning, or derive it from an assumption that the text of the New Testament is inspired. Instantly the other one interrupts him. ‘ Stop,’ he says, ‘ for a moment. Recollect yourself, and be consistent.

What is your attitude towards dogmatic Christianity? Do you believe that directly or indirectly the words of the New Testament come from some miraculous source? Will you stake your moral existence on the truth of the Nicene Creed, of the doctrine of verbal inspiration, of the infallible and supernatural authority of patristic and other traditions? Not you. Rightly or wrongly you assent to the scientific methods of the age; and none of these doctrines for you are more than facts of history. How do you dare then—is this your spiritual honesty—to bully me with texts and opinions whose authority you yourself deny? The fear which you seek to raise in me, and which if you could raise it you would attribute to conscience, would indeed be fear exactly as described by Solomon—it would be a *betrayal of the succours that reason offereth*. At this point matters take a new turn. The prosecutor shifts his ground, and goes back to reason. ‘Suppose,’ he says, ‘I admit your arguments to be right in your own case, that your own personal conscience has not full grounds for condemning you, yet what would be the result were this to be admitted generally? Every one would apply this admission to himself, to justify any caprice however depraved or wanton. He could persuade himself that it applied to his circumstances just as well as to yours.’ ‘My friend,’ the other answers, ‘all that you say sounds admirable, till you come to examine the sense of it. The sense of what you have just urged, if it has any sense, is this:—that we must submit to conscience in cases where we know it to be wrong, for fear that others should not submit to it in cases where it would be right.’

“And so they go on—these arguing voices within me: and I listen to them with an interest in their general bearing which sometimes makes me forget that they have any reference to myself. And then when I remember that they have, and it all again becomes personal, do you know what I am tempted to do? I am so inconsistent that I am sometimes tempted to ask whether my real conscience must not be dead in me—whether I have not lost my perception of right and wrong; if I am able really to doubt as to so grave a matter? And then I try the whole case over again. I lay bare my passion to my conscience, and I ask, does it degrade or raise me? And out of the depths of my conscience, or my consciousness, comes always the same answer. There is a passion that degrades, and there is a passion that raises. Mine is the passion that

raises. How do I know that? By a very simple test—I know it by its fruits. And what may its fruits be? They are these. It has ‘created a soul under the ribs of death.’ It has taught me to value the true treasure of life, not the glittering husk. It has quickened my feeling for all other human beings. It is killing selfishness. It has given to fidelity a meaning I never before conceived. It has made fidelity a part not only of every action, but of every thought. It has nerved me not only for great sacrifices, which once made are made for ever, but for all those self-restraints and self-denials for which occasion is always arising, and in which the larger sacrifices are repeated, as on an altar, daily. It has shown me that the truest pleasures of life are the simplest and also the purest. It has given wings to the flesh, which have fanned themselves into the world of the spirit. It has touched corruption, and corruption has put on incorruption. If any one would understand natural religion, let him understand a natural love like mine. This is that hidden well to which all the pleasures and virtues and faiths and aspirations ‘repairing, in their golden urns draw light.’ It contains everything that can make us value life, and regret yet be resigned to death.”

So wrote Grenville on the day of Mrs. Schilizzi’s departure. That evening he went out to a party, not because he was inclined for society, but because he feared solitude. When he came back to his room his brow was clouded, and again turning to his diary, and bending sadly over the pages, he proceeded thus :—

“On many occasions, but more especially when I have been a passenger on some great ocean steamer, and have watched the beauty of its lines as it sheared the waves, or answered like a living thing to the helm, or when I have looked down, as I often have done, into the engine-room, and seen the ceaseless sliding flash of the huge machinery—the measured reeling of those towers of steel, the cylinders—the rise and fall of the burnished piston-rods—the sway of the returning cranks—rising and falling, turning and returning, all fulfilling faithfully their appointed courses, I have been lost in wonder at the perfect skill of man. I have said over to myself the lines of Sophocles—

‘Full many things are wonderful, but none
More fearful and more wonderful than man.’

And then I have thought of man, as we all know him, imperfect ; and again and again I have said this to myself—What men make is so much better than what they do ; what they do is so much worse than what they are.

“To-night I have felt this last remark to be bitterly true as to myself. In these pages, but an hour or two ago, I was writing about the fidelity which went through all my acts and thoughts. And now to-night—what wayward devil was in me?—miserable as I was, smarting as I was with the sense of *her* absence, I have allowed myself to take some sort of alien pleasure in the eyes of other women. Each time it was for a moment only. It was a poor little starved emotion, which I stamped upon every moment it showed itself. And yet, if she knew of this I should be ashamed. And mentally, amongst all those people, I kept saying to her, ‘Irma, forgive me ; I am yours, and yours only.’ I won’t write more about these misdeeds. Never till now would they have seemed to me misdeeds at all. What to you, Irma, seems an infidelity I should have looked on as fidelity to any other woman.

“This occurs to me. Suppose in this diary I were to be absolutely unreserved, telling all my minutest faults, even to those of each thwarted impulse, not only would another reading it think me worse than I am, but I should probably myself think so. We should both of us probably think that I was vainglorious in describing my virtues, whilst the more candid I was in confessing my sins, that the more sins we both should think remained behind, being too shameful for confession. If one man, or only a few men, are candid in this way, they are certain to be misjudged thus. They will seem to be worse than others, only because they are more honest. And yet if only a few men would with absolute truth give us some record of the workings of their consciences, what advances in knowledge might be made!

“Irma—you will never see what I am writing. These words will never reach you ; but before I go to bed let me solemnly swear this to you—that if you could see the whole of my heart and soul, these sins which, small as they are, I repent so bitterly, would not destroy your faith in me, or make you think me less wholly yours. All my life turns to you. All my life depends on you.”

Mrs. Schilizzi’s plans were to go at once to the Princess and

bring the children back again to the hotel in the forest ; and there, as soon as he could do so, Grenville was to rejoin her. It would be a day or two, therefore, before he could count on hearing from her ; and yet even on the second, though he knew she would be spending it in the train, he fondly hoped that she might manage to despatch a line to him. He knew that under the same circumstances he would do so to her. But no line came. The disappointment could not be said to have taken away the sunlight from him ; but, for all that, it did take away the sunshine. He went mechanically about his melancholy legal business. He dined out as if he had been dining in a dream, and he knew no happiness till weary he went to bed, hoping that sleep would hurry him to a letter from her next morning. There was one. It was written hastily ; most of it was mere fragmentary news, but there was a phrase or two and a sentence that breathed affection, filling him with a sense of it like a box of spikenard broken. That day was a happy one, except for one discovery which it brought to him—that his business would keep him in London for ten days instead of for a week ; but this was again counter-balanced by his news from Mrs. Schilizzi. Her husband, she had just heard in Vienna, would be later in returning than he anticipated ; so they would at all events have time to set their house in order.

That day was a happy one, but the next was a total blank. There was not so much as a line from her. Then came a weary third. Again there was no letter. He had written every day, pouring out to her every thought of his heart. He had hardly been able to bring himself to close his envelopes, and cease sending his voice to her. Like Dante's souls in purgatory, up till now he had been "contented in the flame," but this third day's silence was more than his nerves could bear. No one watching him, no one talking to him, as he went through his business, and dined out, would have guessed from his acuteness in the one case and his flow of conversation in the other, that a tooth sharper than the serpent's was gnawing him under his shirt and waistcoat. A week went by before he had heart to continue his diary, and when he did so his record of that week was as follows :—

"Of all physical maladies perhaps the most acute is sea-sickness, and yet none receives so little pity. With regard to the pains of the soul, the heart, the spirit—the devil knows

what to call it—I am beginning to see that the same thing holds good. Some of the most pitiable are those that would be least pitied. I think this week I have been almost mad sometimes, and even now my temper gets into my pen, and I talk of the devil before I know what I am doing. I am a fool—a fool; and yet I am not a coward, for to all the world I have shown an unruffled front. But—fool I must be; for what is the cause of my wretchedness? Merely that a woman in ten days has written only three times to me, and one of these times only three careless lines. What a trifling calamity that sounds to one who reads of it! but to me who feel it—what has it meant to me? Here is a woman for whose sake I am renouncing everything. I am remaining in London for no other reason than to complete the death of my ambition, and the act that will make me homeless. And through every hour of the day her image has haunted me. Every thought I have thought I have mentally brought to her, as some Catholic votarist lays flowers upon an altar. The one occupation that has given me any real comfort has been to write to her. All my hours of exertion have been like steps to the hour which was dedicated to this writing. And each day all my hopes naturally were to hear from her. I have been accustomed to reason with myself from my own experience; and knowing how to write to her is for me a daily necessity—how every day I am straitened till this is accomplished, I could not but conclude that unless her affection were decreasing, to write to me would be an equal necessity for her.

“Two of her letters have been almost worse than none—evidences of carelessness far more than of care. I was patient at first, though disappointed; but at last the gathering pain burst out in my mind like a fountain of bitter water. Much as I long to be honest, I cannot for very shame’s sake commit to paper all the things I have said about her; and I cannot, for another reason—because no words could express it—commit to paper the misery in which I said them. But the kind of judgment which, in these moods, I have passed upon her, I can describe in general terms. Just as her connection with myself has been ennobled and sanctified in my eyes by my believing it, as I have done, to be the result of a serious passion, so the moment I was tempted to consider that passion a caprice, not even strong enough to have the semblance of

unselfishness, her whole conduct and character have entirely changed their aspect. My devotion to her has turned into a sort of surprised contempt, to be equalled only by my own contempt for myself.

"Stay, stay. It will be perhaps as well if I do actually record one or two specimens of my accusations against her. I have said, 'Here am I, who am giving up all my life to her: and she will not sacrifice for me even five minutes out of the day.' I have said also, 'And does she feel it a sacrifice to write to me? If she does, by feeling so she shows the sacrifice to be worthless.' Again I have imagined myself saying this to her—'The things you value in life, you value in this order—first your children, then your clothes, then your comfort—and after your comfort you have fancied you valued me.'

"And day by day, whilst she was forcing me to think like this of her, I was completing for her sake the surrender of all my worldly prospects. Had I been forced to be solitary, I think I should have gone mad. I have been constantly mixing in society by way of a counter-irritant; and the kindness I have met in the world has seemed such a strange thing to me, when compared with her cruelty, for whom I am giving the world up. A few nights ago, at a concert, whom should I meet but Lady Evelyn Standish! Was she different, or was I different, from what I or she was at Vicenza? It seemed to me that there was a deeper welcome in her eyes. She took evident pleasure in being with me. She contrived to dismiss civilly every one who attempted to interrupt us; and I remained at her side, talking to her all the evening. And I thought, 'I am giving you up for that hard, thankless woman!' And yet, all that evening, not for a single moment did I let voice or look convey any thought or feeling which was more than what a friend might have conveyed, or by which that hard, thankless woman would have been wronged.

"Were my mood as I write this the mood I have been just describing, I should never have had the heart to make so miserable a confession. But I have as yet told only half my story. I have said that I—I myself—have been accusing her. It was not I, but some pack of rebellious voices in me—wolves of the spirit, which in lacerating her, lacerated me first. As for me—as for my real self—I was ashamed that

the purlieus of my mind should harbour such beasts of prey; and day by day I fought with them, beating them down, and striking them into silence. How quickly they sprang up again! Again I struck them down.

"I strengthened myself for this struggle in three ways—first, by thinking how unworthy it was of me, as a man, to allow myself to be so savagely disturbed by anything; secondly, by thinking how, even were the worst I could impute to her true, there was still in her a goodness and a tenderness, as to which I could not have been deceived, and how, if she needed forgiveness, I should find peace in forgiving her; and lastly, by making myself the advocate of her cause, and seeing how much might be said that would altogether justify her. I urged on my own attention how far harder, for many reasons, it probably was for her to write than for me. I argued that the shortness of her letters might be a sign of trust in me, rather than of indifference, showing her to believe that even in a few hasty words I should see the affection whose existence she never dreamed of my doubting. I said to myself again, that under certain circumstances, an affection sure of itself, and sure of the desired return, felt the need of writing less than an affection less deep and trusting; and I also reminded myself of a fact of my own experience—that once or twice, though all day I had been writing letters to her mentally, the actual composition of one had been an effort even to myself.

"In this way I have reduced my mind to order, though I am still smarting after the conflict. Irma, I feel that I owe you so much more than a man owes a woman, under other and more fortunate conditions. I want to subdue pride, and selfishness, and evil temper. I want to offer to you all this self-conquest, though you never know what it has cost me, or reward me by any recognition of it. And yet how easy you might make it, would you only treat me with a kindness which surely would cost you nothing! Of these three last letters you have written me, the last has been really kind, short as it was. Your image, which had almost vanished from me, or become distorted, came close to me and was clear again. The strife in my heart was hushed. The bitter waters became sweet."

A little later he added this:—"Even if at times I pass out of her mind, and she is not conscious that she feels I am of

much value to her, it does not follow that she really is shallow and inconstant. What seems indifference is often merely security; just as rich men often proclaim themselves, and think themselves, indifferent to their riches, yet if asked to part with them would not yield up a penny; and if robbed of them would be miserable. As such men love their riches, so I will believe that she loves me. I am coming to see that men may control their judgments; that judgments which are false are being perpetually suggested to us; and that sometimes we can hold to the true only by an act of will, which enables us to stop our ears to the words of the false witness within us."

Next day he continued—"At last—at last, I am happier. I have heard again from her—it is true a few lines only; but still they showed that she cannot be really changed. She is at Lichtenbourg with her children and the Princess. There have been, she says, no more cases of scarlatina. The place is pronounced safe; and she has told the Princess that I shall be there shortly. My work in London is at last over. The fatal papers will be sent to me at Lichtenbourg for my signature; and at last I am free. I leave England to-morrow."

CHAPTER XXV.

As Grenville returned to Lichtenbourg, he could not help contrasting his journey *from* it, in Mrs. Schilizzi's company, with his present journey, in the company of nothing but his thoughts. It is true he was now hopeful, but his life was hope tempered with anxiety; whereas on that former occasion, though trouble was indeed confronting him, he had hardly had more than a slight foretaste of those minute estrangements which, without killing their affection, had since then inflicted on it the shocks of repeated deaths. He hardly knew then the look of her face in anger. Now he had eaten of the tree of knowledge, and he knew.

At Vienna, however, where he was obliged to pass the night, he was greeted at his hotel by a letter from her, telling

him how she longed for his arrival. The phraseology, it is true, struck him as a little conventional; but under the circumstances he was satisfied. The following day, as he sat in the dusty railway-carriage, the thought of her welcome in the evening shone through his mind like sunlight; the nearer he got to her, the more did his doubts evaporate; and nothing disturbed him till, reaching a certain junction, he found that his train had just missed its connection, and that he would be three hours late in reaching his destination. This *contretemps*, however annoying in itself, constituted, at all events, a valuable counter-irritant, which precluded the recrudescence of any sentimental sorrows; and when at last the later train, by which he was to proceed, arrived, Fate had arranged for him another and more agreeable distraction.

"I was still chafing inwardly," he wrote in his diary, "when Fritz, who had tried vainly to find an empty compartment for me, ushered me into one which had but a single occupant. This was a man who, despite the warmth of the weather, had with him, though not on him, a magnificent rug of sables. The rug was what first struck me; but only a moment later I saw some more magnificence in the shape of a gorgeous dressing-bag. The possessor of all these splendours was himself oddly in keeping with them. In point of age he seemed a well-preserved seventy. His grizzled hair was curly; his grizzled moustaches waxed; one ungloved hand showed a number of turquoise rings; and there gleamed in his eyes, and lurked in his many wrinkles, a seasoned charity towards misconduct which evidently began at home. It was necessary for me to exchange one or two remarks with him, in connection with the moving of some packages; and I saw at once that I was talking to a polished man of the world. I suppose his perception paid me a similar compliment; for, presently producing a cigarette-case that was gilt and jewelled, and sparkled most aggressively with the balls of a monstrous coronet, he offered me a cigarette, which, the moment I had taken a puff at it, I found to be more delicate than anything I before had tasted. Nothing fomented confidence so much as fine tobacco. This, my companion told me, came from Egypt, where he gave me to understand he had means of securing what was choicest. I myself have been once or twice in Cairo, and I mentioned the names of several people connected with it. They were people of high position—travellers,

financiers, diplomats, fashionable visitors, and friends of the late Khedive. The stranger knew all of them by name, and most of them personally. He had begun talking in French. His French was perfect; but he presently saw I was an Englishman, and began talking English. His English was equally good, except perhaps for the accent. I discovered that he knew London. He had been there for six weeks once. His acquaintance had not been large, but it seemed to have consisted exclusively of royal personages, of diplomats, and some of the ultra-fashionable stars of society. Presently the name cropped up of our own ambassador at Vienna. My companion knew him intimately. I said that he was a friend of my own. My companion, whose keen eyes had caught my name on a luggage label, at once assumed a smile of mixed surprise and gratification, and flattered my sense of importance by asking me if I were myself. I told him I was. 'And you know,' he asked, 'Lady Ashford?' On my saying I did, he went on, 'She is coming to stay with me. I have an old castle not very far from Lichtenbourg.' A sudden light broke on me. This must be the Pasha or the devil. Perhaps he was both; he at any rate proved to be the former. I told him I had visited his castle, and that I was now going to Lichtenbourg. He begged me before I left to come for a few days and stay with him. I said, if I could I would. He little knew how unlikely I was to do so.

"When we reached our station, I was annoyed to find that this late train was met by no conveyance from Lichtenbourg. There was one carriage only—a large break, with some coronets on it, whose balls looked like rows of brass-headed nails, and with four milk-white horses. The Pasha, discovering my plight, offered to take me with him, and send me over to Lichtenbourg the following morning; adding, what proved to be quite true, that there was rain in the clouds, and that I had better make sure of shelter. I thanked him, but declined his offer. Irma I knew would even now be waiting for me, and all my heart was famished for the sight of her. I told Fritz to go to a neighbouring posting-house and secure anything on wheels—if even an open cart—which would bring my luggage, and that I would walk on before him. I had a small bag containing a change of clothing, which I slung over my back, and prepared to set out on my pilgrimage. At this moment some drops began to fall, the air grew rapidly

colder, and mixed with the rain came hail. For a moment I doubted whether I would go in this coming down-pour. But my doubts were only momentary; and to the dismay of Fritz I went. I was soon drenched. The rain blinded me, the hail stung me. In half an hour the roads were turning into quagmires, and darkness was coming before its time. I thought I should never arrive. I began to grow bewildered, and once or twice I thought I had lost my way. But at last arrive I did. I hurried through the clipped alleys; I reached the well-known hotel. It was ten o'clock. I pushed the doors open roughly, and showed myself blinking in the hall, an object so strange and weather-beaten, that a waiter and a man from the bureau hurried out, ready to eject me. At last I was recognized; and though they probably thought me mad, they showed me to the room I had ordered, where I hastily changed my things, and then demanded to be shown to the salon of Mrs. Schilizzi and the Princess. I entered. Irma was sitting at the table listlessly, by a great bowl of flowers, not expecting me, and not looking up at first. When she did look up, a cry of delight broke from her. It seemed to me that I had not seen her for years; her voice at first sounded strange. Her face too looked strange. I seemed to have lost the clue to it. For a moment or two we were embarrassed; and then—we looked at each other, and were re-united. Yes—yes; but what happened then? She took my hand and held it. I did not think that that would be all. Some other seal of welcome, some other touch with healing in it—she saw that I expected this; but all in a second, like the writing on Belshazzar's wall, a frown appeared on her forehead, and she almost pushed me from her. 'How *can* you be so silly?' she exclaimed, in a stinging emphatic whisper. 'My aunt's in the next room. Have you absolutely no consideration for me?' I felt that this was unjust. Her conduct at this moment was far more likely to reach the ears of the Princess than the gift of a noiseless moment, which would have satisfied me. 'You know,' she went on, still chilling me by her accent, 'you know that I am glad to see you. But it would have been far better had you managed to come earlier, or else had put off calling on us till some time to-morrow morning.' At this moment the door of the neighbouring room opened, and in bustled the Princess, her face wrinkled with smiles. She asked me how it was I had

managed to come so late. I told her about the trains. I told her also that I had walked. 'Walked!' she exclaimed; 'and in this rain; and all these long nine miles!' I said I had told her niece that I hoped to join them at dinner, and so was determined to reach them in time to excuse myself that night for my absence. As I said this, I was aware that Irma started; and I felt that her eyes were fixed on me with a new expression. I met them in one rapid look, and they were full of a repenting tenderness. And now, too, her voice came musical to my ears with solicitude, as she exclaimed to her aunt, 'And most likely he's had no dinner. Do let us ring, and see if we can't get him something here.'

"The Princess assented. She also was full of kindness; but just at this juncture Fritz appeared at the door, announcing not only that he had arrived and the luggage, but also that a supper for me was ready in my own room. Till a moment ago I had no knowledge that I was hungry. But the change in Irma's manner, I suppose by restoring peace to me, left me free to listen to the cries of appetite. I was more than hungry. I was faint indeed; and confessing as much, I left them, receiving as I went from Irma's hand and eyes an assurance whose charm made every nerve cease aching. In the passage the manager met me, wanting to tell me something about the money I lent the doctor. I gather it will be repaid in a day or two. If that is the case, it will no doubt be a great convenience to me. I shall hear about it to-morrow. I couldn't attend to-night. Wearied as I am by my walk, and disposed to sleep as I am by my supper, I have only been able to get through this piece of diary, because I am inspired by the happiness which her last look gave me. Irma, so long as you are true to me, I can bear anything; and I can see ahead of us many things that must be borne. Let us try together so to bear all, that what is ignoble in many cases may not be so in ours. Irma, during the days which we still have to ourselves, never quarrel with me—never move aside from me. Watch with me. Is there in the heart of things any reason why I should not say, *Pray with me*? I shall see you, I shall be with you, to-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow, and many to-morrows afterwards, uninterrupted. Be to me always what you have been!"

This last request, though it never reached Mrs. Schilizzi's ears, was granted by her during the next few days partially,

though not entirely. She never quarrelled with him. The daggers he had discovered she could use were all hid in their sheaths; but her old frankness, at once passionate and child-like, was, except on rare occasions, troubled by a certain nervousness, which was not far from irritability, and which sometimes indeed only avoided being so by taking the form of preoccupation.

The proximate cause of this was evidently the presence of the Princess, from whose company they could escape only for precarious intervals. People who judge of the lives of others from a distance, are accustomed to make light of impediments of this kind. They quote the proverb, "Where there's a will there's a way," and affirm that if somebody had but really wished it, he or she could of course have done so-and-so. Such critics of conduct entirely fail to realize how strong are the fetters, fine and invisible though they may be, which the most trivial of social circumstances can sometimes weave around us; and Grenville and Mrs. Schilizzi constantly found now that a *tête-à-tête* was as wholly beyond their reach as if for the time being there was a whole ocean between them. He, however, could not get rid of the feeling that the difficulties which beset them were sometimes unnecessarily increased by a perverse timidity on her part, the suspicion of which pained and troubled him. Still, in spite of all this, hardly a day passed on which they did not secure at least an hour together—either in the sitting-room, when the Princess was enjoying her siesta, or else where some seat in the gardens lurked amongst sequestered leafage.

During these interviews the last thing with which he could tax her was hardness; but at moments he was conscious on her part of a certain gentle shrinking from him, and her eyes appealed to him as if full of some unuttered truth which, it seemed, she longed to tell him, pleading with him for encouragement to do so. As for him, he vacillated between two moods—a mood of compassion, made all the deeper and more unselfish by the passion that was absorbed and lurked in it; and a mood of sadness caused by the importunate contrast between her old remembered frankness and this present estranging hesitancy.

At last she began to give him some clue to her feelings. They were seated, as they often were, in the gardens. "Bobby," she began. He looked at her. Her eyes had tears in them.

She glanced round her hastily to see that there was no one near, and took his hand, as if she were clinging to his sympathy. "Bobby," she began again, and her voice was oddly tremulous, "I wonder what you would do supposing that this happened—supposing that some day you were to discover I had become very good. Would you cease to care for me? Would you go quite away from me?"

His answer was, "No; you asked me that once before."

"I expect you would," she said, ignoring these last words. "Not at first, perhaps; but later. It would necessarily make some difference."

"Will you," he said presently, "be patient, and let me answer you slowly; and if you find me hesitating in my phrases, believe me that the reason is this—I am not trying to hide my thoughts, but to find them. Yes," he resumed, after a pause, "you are right. It would make a difference. It wouldn't destroy my affection for you; but I think that for that very reason it would separate us. Irma—what I am saying might, to a gross mind, seem to bear quite a base and selfish sense; but the gross mind would quite misapprehend me. That chain which you talk of severing, though important in one sense, in another sense how unimportant it has been to us! Subtly and closely as it has helped to bind us together, how few and how slender have been its links. We have not valued it for its own sake. It has been hidden and lost in its results. And yet, Irma—yet—how shall I pick my words? Listen—let me put it like this. We are accustomed to speak of ourselves as souls and bodies; and when affection is slight and passion strong, we are for practical purposes thus divisible; and we can, if we will it, sacrifice either element to the other. But when affection is not slight, but fills and absorbs the soul, the soul then fills and absorbs the body; and the body is to this transfigured affection what the brain is to the intellect. Low and high, good and bad—you cannot cut up a unity into such divisions as these. Some people may say that it is nobler to think than to eat; but without doing the one we never shall do the other."

She watched him as he spoke, weighing every word, far out of reach of the hiss of any impure propriety, her heart not insulting her cheeks with the indecency of a blush. She was face to face with the eternal mysteries of existence—not a body, not a ghost, but a woman; and the eyes with which

she watched him were, in the words of Byron, "All youth, but with an aspect beyond time." He saw that she expected him to continue. "I think," he said, "thus far I know my meaning clearly; but when I come to the practical application of it, I am doubtful. I naturally should incline to say that I couldn't part from you by halves. And yet, again, by no arguments of mine will I even try to sway your conscience against your will. If your conscience tells you to take a certain course——"

He paused. "Dear," she said, "go on. Tell me."

"I believe," he said, "I could bear any change in your conduct so long as it meant no change in your disposition towards me. I could never reproach you—never. And yet, if our dispositions remain unchanged—however I argue, I am brought back to this—our only course is to part or to change nothing."

"Dear," she said gently, "I haven't the strength to change. But I must teach you a new lesson. You must pity as well as love me."

This conversation left Grenville full of trouble, and presented his whole conduct in a new and ghastly light to him. So far indeed as it was conduct concerning himself only, his judgment of it was in no way altered; but if she were becoming unhappy on account of her own partnership in it, her unhappiness he felt would be his work. So long as she was at peace with herself, her attachment to him might be raising her; but the moment she began to despise herself on account of it, it would begin to degrade and ruin both her and him together. And in that case he asked himself what course would be open to him? To abandon her and to remain with her seemed equally fraught with misery. These considerations gathered in his mind like clouds; but before they had done more than cast some advancing shadows, Mrs. Schilizzi's quiet seemed to have come back to her; and Grenville's storm floated away and evaporated. That evening, when he was playing a game of chess with her, she said,

"I agree with you quite in all that you said this morning. You took me too seriously; and yet I am glad you did—because else I should not have heard you explain the matter so clearly."

"What is he explaining?" said the Princess, looking up from her book. "Are you two turning into philosophers over your game?"

"We were puzzled by a problem," said Grenville, "and have now solved it by experience."

Next day, when they found themselves alone in the gardens, Mrs. Schilizzi alluded to this slight incident.

"You see," she said, "how careful one ought to be. My aunt's ears are like needles. I was in fault last night; but I'm often afraid that you may say something imprudent. Do be kind to me; don't when we are with her lower your voice in talking to me, or do anything to suggest even that there is any understanding between us. Perhaps she would never dream of such a thing. Perhaps I'm absurdly nervous; but think how fatal might be the least suspicion on her part. When I first met you," she went on presently, "I would have sat with you and whispered with you for hours, if you would have condescended to do so, without a thought or fear of either my aunt or any one. But now—— This is our seat; I'm tired, Bobby. Let us sit down. You did the talking yesterday. Let me do it to-day. As I told you, dear, I have thought over all you said; and I agree with it; and oh, believe me, I don't want you to go. I think that yesterday I gave you a wrong impression; and I think I was wrong about my own meaning myself. I think that what has been troubling me chiefly these last few days has not been the thought of sin; for to-day, as much as ever, I feel that my soul has been made alive through you. But—I wonder if you would understand? You are not a woman. How should you? And for you things are all so different."

He protested that this was not so. She shook her head sadly, and not without an effort continued—

"As to the way in which most people would condemn me, in that way I don't condemn myself, and I don't pretend to. The hypocrisy of self-condemnation is as bad as the hypocrisy of self-approval. But what I feel is this. Till lately I had nothing that I cared to conceal from any one; and now, as you saw in London, and as you again see here, I am obliged to conceal things even from my mother-in-law and my aunt; and by and by, Bobby, all this will be worse. Naturally I am so very simple. I like all things—even my sorrows—to be straightforward; and this seems to be destroying the simplicity of my life. I am not ashamed of loving you; nor am I ashamed of wronging Paul, for it is impossible for me to believe that I am doing so; but I am ashamed—or, at least,

dear, I am troubled—by the thought of having to live with half my frankness gone."

"I understand you," he answered. "Irma, what can I say? If you suffer like this, it is I who have caused your suffering; and if for your sake I suffer in the same way myself, that will hardly be much comfort. Do you know, during the last two days I have thought your aunt has been wondering what keeps me at Lichtenbourg. Ah, if we only could both be open!"

"See!" she exclaimed, "here are the children. They have come out to look for us."

And the happiness of a mother shone suddenly in her eyes, and gave to her laugh the gay ripple of girlhood.

Grenville was puzzled, as he had sometimes been before, by the odd inconsequence of her moods. He for his part, whatever might be the case with her, could not free his mind of the thoughts she had just suggested to him; and before they had another opportunity of renewing their conversation, he eased his mind by writing and transmitting to her the following note—

"I have been thinking of what you said about lying. I hate a lie just as you do. I remember once for a whole fortnight I felt contrite and humiliated by a lie I told to get off a dinner-party. Lying seems to reduce one to the level of a naughty school-boy. And yet even the early Christians, in times of persecution, though if questioned with regard to their faith they were, of course, bound to bear witness to it, were expressly forbidden to let it be so much as suspected unnecessarily. If our faith to one another has any of those qualities in it, which we believe it to have, we may hope to protect it without stooping to a denial of it. We shall not for that reason lead a life that is externally easier, but at least we shall keep unsullied our own self-respect; and that is a talisman which will save us at least from one thing—that voluntary parting, more bitter than any enforced one, which is caused when two who have clung together faithfully, discover at last that neither is worth the faith of the other."

That same evening she had one moment alone with him. She looked thoughtful, but much happier.

"Do you know," she said to him hastily, "what you do, when you tell me things? You seem to cut an alley through a wood that I thought impassable, and I see suddenly a gleam of light at the end."

"More philosophy!" exclaimed the Princess, entering. "Come—come. We ordered dinner at seven. Give me your arm, Bobby Grenville, and let me totter along with you to the restaurant."

CHAPTER XXVI.

GRENVILLE little knew when he took his seat at their table, how soon the peace in his mind, which just seemed to have renewed itself, was about to be broken again in a yet more serious way, and the bitterness of the lot he had chosen was again to make itself felt.

They were later than most of the company, and there were many people departing before their own meal had arrived at its middle stage. The Princess was studying the moving figures through her spectacles, when she suddenly, in her penetrating voice, exclaimed—

"Baron—baron, won't you look at me?"

A tall, grizzled man started, and then caught sight of her. They shook hands effusively. She asked him how long he had been at Lichtenbourg. He said for two days, and that that night he was leaving.

"You know my niece?" said the Princess.

The Baron turned to Mrs. Schilizzi.

"Of course," he said; "but I have not met you since you were married. Once or twice I have seen you walking with your husband, and I wondered if my mind was deceiving me when it whispered that I had the honour of knowing you. Will you have the goodness to present me to Herr von Schilizzi?"

Grenville, despite every effort, was conscious that his brows contracted; and though as a matter of fact his colour changed but little, he felt that his face must be hot with indignant protest. The mistake was corrected almost as soon as made; and his vanity was soothed by finding that this stranger recognized his name when it was mentioned, and bowed to him with evident deference. But Mrs. Schilizzi had noted every change in his expression; and after the Baron had gone, she

became absorbed and silent. The manner of the Princess too, though he did not notice it at the time, underwent, as he reflected afterwards, an almost imperceptible change.

"The Baron," she said to him presently, "has a beautiful old castle in Styria. There is hardly a roof that doesn't let in the rain, and hardly a table with more than three legs. It's so old and dirty, that I'm sure you should have a look at it."

Grenville felt that this allusion to his tastes was not very sympathetic; and before dinner was over he became a trifle embarrassed by the Princess asking him what other anti-quinities he would visit, and when his official engagements would be taking him back to London. The doubt came back to him which he had mentioned to Mrs. Schilizzi, as to whether his continuance at Lichtenbourg had struck the Princess as curious; and instinct rather than reason at once supplied him with a defence.

As to his return to London, a vague answer was sufficient. "But as to old castles," he went on good-naturedly, "I have been asked to be a guest at another, and that is the castle of our Pasha. If I like to go there, I believe I shall be welcome in a week or so; and meanwhile this is a charming place to wait at."

With this intelligence the Princess seemed quite content. With an almost motherly friendliness, "Help me up from my chair," she said, "and come to our room to be beaten again at chess."

The game that evening proceeded almost in silence. No word or look came from Mrs. Schilizzi which showed that her thoughts had strayed beyond knights and pawns and bishops. The following day when he started on his usual stroll with her, she surprised him by saying with decision—

"I am not going to stay out long." And as soon as they had reached a walk which was comparatively unfrequented, she began, "I want to tell you something. You had much better go away. It is best for every reason."

Surprised and bewildered, he asked her what she meant. "Where must I go? Why must I go? When?"

"Soon," she said. "Can't you see that my aunt is beginning to wonder about you? and any morning I may hear from my husband that he is coming. Indeed I shouldn't be surprised if he came without my hearing. I'm getting so uncomfortable I hardly know what to do."

It was not only what she said, but there was a peculiar quality in her manner, that roused in Grenville a certain sense of injustice, and seemed to have placed at once a distance between him and her.

"Certainly," he replied, "if you wish it, I will go. It is true I have nowhere to go to—except, I suppose, England. I have no home, as you know, either there or anywhere."

"England!" she exclaimed. "No—I didn't mean that."

"Well then, Paris, if you like it better. I can easily make arrangements to go by the evening train."

"Don't be silly," she cried. "Do try to understand me. I only mean, go away for a day or two; and if you like to do so, come back when Paul arrives. It matters about my aunt, so much more than about him; and if you are here when he is, it will look so much better to her."

"Do you mean then that I must go at once? Tell me. I am at your orders."

Her tone was almost tender; but as she went on it grew chilly again. "No—no—I don't want you to go to-day. That would look worse than if you remained till Christmas. But talk to my aunt about going—make her think you are going. It will be quite enough, in any case, if you go to the Pasha for a day or two. Come," she said presently, "I must be turning back again. For the last two mornings I have neglected my children; and I mean to teach them some lessons before luncheon."

Grenville could not help being annoyed at the instructions given him. The matter of them he could bear, but what he could not bear was the manner. The former affected him like any ordinary pain, which he could accept with fortitude and acquiescence; but the latter seemed rather to produce some irritated rebellion of the nerves, whose action lay beyond the province of fortitude. "Of course," he said to himself, "I will go should she really wish it; or even if I see myself that it is well for her that I should go. But she seems to think that if she wishes to send me away, I can be sent away like a footman, and rung for when I again am wanted."

In this language he recognized the return of the temper which had attacked and tortured him in London, and with which he had so long struggled there. He found, however, that he had since then advanced considerably in the art of self-discipline. The cruel thoughts that now whispered them-

selves in his ear against her he managed to charm away, by quoting from his memory, as a saint might quote a text to the devil, some former words of love, or some look of trust and kindness. He tried to place himself in her exact position, and see the requests she made him as he supposed she saw them herself. He also—although on reflection he considered them quite unnecessary—faithfully followed her instructions with regard to his conduct towards the Princess. Without committing himself to a statement as to when he was going to leave, he let the Princess know, as he could do with perfect truth, that he expected very shortly to be going to see the Pasha; and more than this, with regard to Mrs. Schilizzi, he put, out of deference to her wishes, a restraint on his manner and movements, whenever they were in the Princess's presence, which seemed as superfluous to his judgment as it was trying to his feelings.

But though Grenville outwardly was perfectly calm and good-tempered, and to Mrs. Schilizzi, whenever he was alone with her, tender, his life for the next few days was one constant effort of self-control. Apart from the Princess or her children he daily saw less and less of her. She did not deny him the walks which had by this time become habitual; but she professed a distaste for the lonelier parts of the gardens; she kept as much as she could to the paths which were most frequented; and she seemed by preference to take the children with her. She did not find fault or quarrel with him; but she did what was more estranging. She avoided, as far as she could, all topics that were personal, and whenever he tried to approach them, she adroitly turned to others. He had sometimes thought her hard, he had sometimes thought her cruel. He was now fretted with an even worse suspicion of her—that so far as he was concerned she was gradually showing herself frivolous.

Inward troubles like these, depending on such slight vicissitudes, seem to many people to be hardly troubles at all, and to need on a man's part no firmness in bearing them. Let such people consider how small and hidden an injury in the vital parts of the body may cause the most intolerable suffering; and they then may learn that a mind may be sometimes as sensitive as a stomach, and that the finest minds, though they may show suffering least, are those that feel it most, and need most strength to bear it. Grenville's secret sufferings

were of two kinds. First was the sense, made the more difficult to deal with because it was doubtful, that the woman who had been so near to him was now gradually withdrawing herself; whilst a phantom was constantly facing him of his own coming desolation. Secondly was a sense of his own unutterable folly, supposing this woman to be actually thus treating him. All the thoughts which were in the service of his own self-love began to plot together, and break out into insurrections, threatening her and clamouring to be revenged on her; but never once, by an angry look or word, did he allow a sign of this inward tumult to escape him. On the contrary, whilst one part of his mind was stinging him with distrust of her and resentment, he forced himself, by the aid of another part, to act as if he completely trusted her. However unreasonable or capricious her conduct and words might seem to him, he forced himself to interpret them in some way to her advantage; nor did he relax his forbearance, though it hourly grew more difficult, as he looked in vain for any sign that she was touched by it, or was even aware of it.

As time went on the situation became nearly intolerable. Every day he hoped for some softening change in her, and every day was the casket of some fresh and complete disappointment. Not only did she avoid anything like personal conversation, but she avoided even the literary and other subjects in which formerly she had shown the deepest interest; or if for a moment or two she would now and then allude to them, instead of considering what he said, she ignored or sharply contradicted it. At last, indeed, he was growing to dread rather than look forward to his meetings with her; when one morning, to his extreme surprise, she received him with a voice and look like those of their early days—those days in the forest, which seemed now like some lost existence.

"Bobby," she said softly, "I have a great deal to say to you. I am going this morning to take you for a walk in the country—you see I am ready. Have you got your hat? Then come."

Hardly able to believe in such a return of happiness, Grenville walked by her side, unconscious of the road they were taking, till she said, "We will go to a place where I took you once before." He then realized that they were on their way to the mill. "Listen," she went on presently.

"This morning I have heard from Paul. He perhaps will be here to-morrow, or at farthest the day after ; and my aunt, who has only been staying here in order to keep me company, has settled already to return home after luncheon."

Grenville looked at her, and received the news in silence. One curious thing struck him about her. Circumstances were approaching which, more than all others, might seem calculated to increase the nervousness she had so often before exhibited ; but the nervousness instead of increasing seemed to have wholly vanished. She was serious indeed ; but so far as frankness goes, she was as fearlessly, as affectionately frank, as she had been on the lake or in the hunting-lodge. Only now even she surprised him by what seemed an outburst of caprice, though it was not of a kind to pain him ; and her manner, even if it had been, was quite enough to have robbed it of every sting. "Darling !" she exclaimed suddenly,—it was long since she had used that word,—“will you mind if I ask you one thing ? Let us turn back now, and go for this walk later. My aunt will have left by that time ; and the whole afternoon will be our own. I don't want to be hurried. I have so much to say to you."

Grenville assented, and they returned almost in silence—a silence of union, not a silence of estrangement.

"I hope," said the Princess to Grenville, just before her departure, when Mrs. Schilizzi happened to have left the room, "I hope you'll write and tell me of your visit to this wonderful Pasha ; and if you have time on your hands, come back again to me. I," she continued, "am wanted here no longer, now that Irma will have her husband ; and I've business at home that has been asking for me for the last five days. As you are not going directly, you of course will make his acquaintance. He's not grând, like your friends the Count and Countess—but I don't know any one with a better head on his shoulders."

Grenville wondered if in this there was any oblique hint to himself. Of one thing he had become aware at all events, that the Princess saw no need of conveying any hints to her niece.

"Tell me," said Mrs. Schilizzi, when the Princess had driven off, "should you mind, Bobby, if we took the children with us ? It would give them so much pleasure ; and I should like it myself, for other reasons. I can't bear to think that

you should come between me and them; and indeed you don't! But I was a little afraid of you thinking that they might come between you and me. They won't; but I'll do as you wish about it."

"Take them," he said; and she saw that he said it willingly.

They went again by the way they had gone that morning. They came to the place where the well-remembered path took them from the high-road, and led them by the willows and the river.

"Have you forgotten," she said to him, "the day when I first brought you here? I keep in my mind every word that you said to me. My soul was being born that day, and all the world seemed beautiful."

"I," he answered, "have also forgotten nothing."

"Let us," she said, "for the time—let us forget something. Let us forget our troubles. For a few hours let us be happy. Let our walk now be a continuation of our other walk. Bobby, you smile. For a few hours be happy with me." She took his arm for a moment or so, and leant on it. "Look," she exclaimed presently, "did you see that water-ousel, with its little white breast? How pretty it was! It darted out from the shadow of those two bushes. Those bushes when last we were here had very few leaves on them. You picked up a stone, when we went past them. I remember what you said. I wonder if you do? You said that when two people were really fond of each other, the heavens were opened for them. I wonder, Bobby, if they will be open for me much longer?"

Before he could answer she had begun calling to the children, as if to escape from feelings which she could no longer control. "Come," she said, "both of you and show me those pretty flowers." The children came, and trotted like dogs along by her, extracting a promise that they should have tea at the mill. They had it in the summer-house which Grenville so well remembered. Every incident of that first visit to it recurred to him. His present life was then just beginning, with all its rapture, and all its unforeseen bitterness. The rude green table, scratched over with the names of tourists, stared at him like some papyrus inscribed with his own destiny. But what that destiny was, was still a riddle to him. Was it heaven or ruin? At this moment it seemed heaven. Irma was by his side; and the children were laugh-

ing close to them. They too laughed with the children, distributing the simple delicacies ; and to all four of them cakes and cream and sugar seemed for the moment to be the greatest pleasures of life, and its most important problem the division of them.

At last when the little mouths were beginning to move more slowly, Mrs. Schilizzi said, "Now, children, go and play." Off they flew like two obedient butterflies, and the mother's face then turned towards Grenville, and her lips said tremulously, "Listen—I want to speak to you."

"Yes?" he said. He saw that she struggled for her voice. She found it only with an effort.

"Bobby," she said at last, "you won't go away and leave me?"

With the eloquence that lies only in words broken and chosen helplessly, he protested that he would not. "Why," he asked, "should you think so?"

"For many reasons," she said. "I can hardly tell yet how many. When Paul comes, I shall know."

"Does he mind what you do, Irma?"

"He would mind," she said, "anything which he thought was an affront to himself. But he doesn't care in any other way. How I spend my life, or that I have a life to spend, is a thing that hardly occurs to him. But the fonder I am of you—does not this seem strange?—the stronger grows my sense of the duties I owe to him."

"No," said Grenville, "I don't think it is strange."

"I want," she went on, "to give him all I can, except one thing—to wait on him when he orders me ; to be good-tempered with him ; to be his hired companion—to respect his crotchets—to be a good ornamental servant—to give him what he has paid for. And to give him this, dear, I shall have to be robbing you—I mean of my time. Often I shall be unable to see you ; and then you will be disgusted, and angry with me."

"Never," he said, "never. And yet, Irma, I may be tempted to be. I know what an unreasonable thing one's reasoning often is ; but, in my real heart of hearts, instead of being angry, I shall admire you. We talked about truth the other day. You see yourself how truth is still open to you."

"Perhaps it is," she answered. "Still I am getting so

fearful. Bobby—if I seem to neglect you, will you promise me not to be angry? Oh—but that's not the worst. Many little things may happen, and I shall be forced to lie. I shall—I foresee it all. Listen," she went on, and looked him full in the eyes—"I am naturally very truthful; and if ever you find I am not so—I don't mean not so to you—will you promise me to remember this?—that I

'Put to proof art alien to the artist,
Once, and only once, and for one only.'

Yes—I know you think you will. I see your lips move, but I can't hear what you say. But I wonder if you will really. Oh, tell me—tell me, if I have to lie for you, tell me you won't hate me."

"Irma," he said, "the very fact that you ask me this, is a proof that you never can do anything that will part me from you. Whatever blame there may be to fall on any one, it will be mine, not yours."

"Tell me," she went on, hardly heeding his words, and yet reassured by the tone of them, "tell me, Bobby, that I may always lean upon you—always feel that in spirit, even if not in the body, you are close to me, that you are upholding me, and that you will never, never abandon me. Will you never go away from me? Are you sure? Are you quite sure?"

Her hand had stolen into his, holding it in a convulsive clasp. He answered her slowly, "I am weighing each word I utter. Look—the people of the mill are moving about in sight of us; the children are close by; I can do nothing but speak. I put all my life into those four words—I am quite sure."

"I believe you," she said. "I am happier. Come, let us go back again."

Next morning she sent him a note early.

"Paul," it ran, "will be here at ten. He has been travelling all night. Let me see you in the garden, just for one five minutes."

They met. There was little to say. Their thoughts seemed to partake of the breathless character of their words; but he pulled from his pocket a crumpled sheet of paper, and said to her—

"See—this is what I wrote last night."

"Read it," she said. "We still have a minute or two. Sit down here, and read it; and let me look at it whilst you do so."

What he read was as follows; and when he had read it, she took the paper from him.

"Your eyes and mine are turned towards the light;
How can our footsteps tend towards the night?
They do not—cannot: though above our road
Sorrow and clouds are gathering like a load.
For learn this secret: 'Tis to us allowed
To make a silver lining to our cloud:
And we will turn the dark to daylight by
That one clear lamp—our own fidelity.
You will be faithful—will you? This I know,
I shall not leave you till you make me go."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THIS brief interview was duly noted in his diary, which continued thus:—

"The event of this morning, though I knew it must happen some day, used to seem as vague a thing to me as to healthy people death seems. Latterly, indeed, I had felt its aspect growing day by day distincter; but distincter only as being more distinctly miserable: and even now it has taken place I am doubtful what it may portend. Anyhow, this man has at last become a reality for me, and what I think of myself will depend on what I think of him. Hitherto, though I have met and talked and dined with him, he has been a mere abstraction to me; and I had begun to wonder whether my recollection of him could be accurate, and whether it might not be doing him some grotesque wrong. Should such prove to be the case, I foresaw that my position would be this—the better I was obliged to think of him, the worse I should be obliged to think of two other people. Am I then, in order to think well of myself, reduced to the necessity of hoping that I may be able to think ill of another? No—not quite that. I don't want him to be bad. Let him be indifferent to her—that is all I ask for. I should hate to injure

him. Let me find that he is incapable of being injured. Hitherto I have often said to myself that if I influence his life at all, it will be for good, because I may help her to bear his yoke more happily. But now that the time has come for putting this view to the test, doubts have begun to trouble me. I was thinking only yesterday that when he came, it would be like the day of judgment, arraigning me and revealing me before myself. And now he has come, and, like the day of judgment, suddenly.

"To a certain extent, what I have just written is ancient history. When events which we have long been dreading actually arrive, we often find them to be like shadows, which look absolutely black from a distance, but which prove when we enter them to be merely a clouded daylight. That was my experience this morning. We were in the garden for very few minutes. He was expected by ten at the earliest, and our watches were not hurrying us; but so anxious was she to be on the spot awaiting him, that we were back at the hotel a quarter before the hour. She paused on the steps, and said to me—

"‘What will you do to-day? I shall hardly be able to see you—indeed, I had better not.’

"A sudden inspiration came to me. ‘I will go,’ I said, ‘and call on the Pasha.’

"The proposal pleased her. We entered. When we were in the hall, the first thing that met our eyes was a large portmanteau, with the letters ‘P. S.’ painted on it.

"‘He has come!’ she cried. ‘Don’t move a step farther with me.’

"And before I had time to think, she was hurrying up the stairs. As for me, I was on the point of returning to the garden, when I heard her break into a laugh, and distinguished this exclamation, ‘Well!’ She had reached the first landing, and a man had come down towards her. I could not move. I was constrained to observe the meeting. I saw his boots first—shining varnished boots, with buff tops to them. Then I saw his whole figure. Yes, there he was—my friend of the Orient Express, even worse than I had pictured him. They shook hands; and then, as if he were performing some necessary duty, he gave her a hasty kiss, seeming relieved when it was over. ‘I suppose,’ he said, ‘you have had your coffee long ago. As for me, I’ve been ordering a d——d good English

breakfast.' And he made a cluck with his tongue, as I had heard him do in the train—a sign, I presume, of satisfaction at his own promptitude.

"All this took place in considerably less than a minute. I turned away, and the weight on my heart was lightened. How well I remembered his voice. In the train I had thought it oily. It sounded now as if there were a sort of grit in it. Its tone was hard, almost ironical—the very negation of affection.

"At this moment I was button-holed by the hotel manager. 'The doctor,' he said, 'will repay me in a week your loan to him. He told me so last night. He was very anxious about the matter. Of course I have never said that the money came from your Excellency.' Well—I have been looking at my bank-book. The repayment will be very welcome; but just then the matter came to me as an irritating trifle.

"I wandered out of doors. I determined to avoid meeting them. *Them*, I say—*them*! How strange it seems to be obliged to think of her as bound to any human being besides myself!—to find suddenly that I am an outsider! But after all it is easier to bear than I expected. The look of the man, the coldness of his greeting—that has taken my worst fears away, and I found myself, to my surprise, almost in good spirits.

"My one wish now was to be away for the whole day; so without returning to the hotel, I went to a stand of carriages, and taking a light *fiacre* at once set off for my Pasha's. Was it pain or pleasure that filled me during the drive? I can hardly tell; but I know that all the way *her* voice was in my ears, *her* cheeks were close to me; her presence was in the woods and brooks, still lingering there like a perfume. I reached the castle, as I had expected, just about the hour of *déjeuner*. I sent in my card, and a smooth-faced French valet soon appeared at the gates, who smilingly invited me to enter. I was taken up a private staircase, to a round room in a tower, where I found the Pasha arranged tastefully on a divan. He was draped in a gorgeous dressing-gown, and reading a French novel. My eyes were so dazzled by the red and gold on the walls, and by silver crescents studding an azure ceiling, that the Pasha had risen and was hospitably pressing my hand before I was aware of seeing anything clearly. He was charmed, he was ravished to receive me. He had feared I had quite forgotten him. Breakfast would be ready presently.

Would I excuse him whilst he completed his toilette? He took me by the arm, and led me to another room—a room which I recognized, dim with purple velvet, and glimmering through its dimness with silver inkstands and blotting-books. He left me here alone with a copy of the *Vie Parisienne*, and presently reappeared, doing infinite credit to his tailor, illuminated by three rose-buds and some maiden-hair fern in his buttonhole, and breathing perfume like a god of Greek mythology.

“‘Let us descend,’ he said. ‘By the way, there is here a friend of yours. You must come and pass some days with me, and help me to entertain her. I have now here only ladies. There was a gentleman coming, but he has failed me.’

“Before I had time to ask him who my friend was, some folding-doors were thrown open by a servant, and I found myself in the vaulted hall, with its mountains of Florentine furniture. Amongst these in a moment I distinguished the figure of Lady Ashford, and was conscious at the same time of the rustle of other dresses besides hers. Lady Ashford greeted me with her usual charm of manner; but I fancied—though this must have been fancy only—that she eyed me a little curiously, as if thinking of the prophecies she had made about me two months ago. She certainly expressed surprise at my not being yet at Constantinople. Then, whilst we were talking, there appeared from behind a piano—who? Why the very two ladies who had been pointed out to me in the Prater—the Baroness X—and Miss Juanita Markham. The Baroness is a woman of disagreeable expression, youthful in dress, in years a faded fifty; and there is all the light of superannuated intrigue in her eyes. As for the girl, her whole toilette was wonderful. Her dress suggested a yachting costume, but there was nothing loud or startling in it. It was wonderful for a far more subtle reason. It seemed in its fit and finish like a caress or embrace by herself of her own beauty. It specially called attention to her throat, her waist, and her wrists. Her faultless shoes did the same thing for her feet, and her dainty fringe for her forehead. Her hands, exquisitely modelled, quietly called attention to themselves. Why do I write all this? Why do I notice these things? I suppose because she contrived to make me notice them. And yet never was there a girl whose demeanour was more fastidi-

ously quiet. Let me say no more about her. To me she is less than nothing. I hardly spoke to her.

"Suddenly a gong sounded, as if in honour of some Indian idol, and we went in to breakfast. On our way we passed through that series of gaudy rooms, with their jewelled armour on their walls, and with their tapestry hangings, at which Irma and I smiled. Lady Ashford sat on one side of me, and the Baroness on the other. The Baroness peered at me superciliously. I talked almost entirely to Lady Ashford. We talked naturally of what had happened to us since the night of our dinner-party in Vienna; and again she asked me when I was going to begin my duties. I cannot flatter myself that I was extremely candid; and oddly enough, neither was she. I felt certain she was not, from her manner. She had been in Italy—there was nothing odd about that; but then, she had come back to Vienna instead of going to London; and about this move of hers there was evidently some mystery. Later on, I obtained, as I think, a clue to it.

"The Pasha after breakfast insisted on taking us for a drive. We all sat together in the brake which had taken him from the station. I did not enjoy myself. I was constantly and unpleasantly aware that that girl's eyes were trying to catch mine. I exerted myself to talk, but my voice was far from my thoughts, like that of a plover crying far from its nest. The Pasha insisted that I should remain for dinner; and in one way I was glad to do so, as I wished to be as late as I could in getting back to Lichtenbourg. After our drive he took me to his smoking-room. He is certainly an agreeable man, and his manners are highly polished. Indeed they are like furniture on which the polish is hardly dry. As for origin, he comes, I believe, of a distinguished family; but still, though he is as much of a gentleman as an adventurer could well be, what one sees first in him is the adventurer rather than the gentleman. Well—having talked about everybody, and almost everything, in Europe and in Egypt, he told me he had been expecting a visit from the King of Moldavia, who I then recollected had a villa at Lichtenbourg. I saw in his eye an odd ambiguous light, and I suddenly began to suspect what I am quite sure is the truth. He had asked Miss Markham here in order that she might meet the King. The King, it appears, however, is not able to come; and the Pasha is consequently finding his party a trifle flat. 'Lady

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Ashford,' he said with a certain discontented dryness, 'is here looking after her niece, whose chest is delicate, and who ought to avoid draughts. I fear Lady Ashford gives herself unnecessary trouble. Baroness X—— could have taken care that Miss Markham took no cold.'

"'My dear man,' I said mentally to him, 'Baroness X—— could take care of most things.' Yes—Miss Markham is obviously the reason of her aunt's return to Vienna, and of her presence here. It's an odd story, full of painful suggestions; and it made me glad when I was once quit of the gates, and breathing the clear night air, on my way back through the forests. Irma, since I have known you, things shock and pain me which once I should have laughed at with indifference.

"It was eleven o'clock when I arrived. Fritz was full of alarm about me. And so at last this strange day is over. The morning of it seems to me as if it were years ago: and as for *her*, when did I last see her? When shall I see her next? And how? Will it be to-morrow?"

To this closing question events answered Yes; and they gave their answer early. About ten o'clock he hoped he might have a note from her; and to kill the intervening time which, when he was dressed, confronted him, he walked down to the springs, and watched the morning water-drinkers. These were now numerous—a variegated and well-dressed crowd; some clustering round the pavilions at which the several waters were dispensed, others moving slowly along the winding walks. Grenville looked on with an absent kind of amusement, his eyes caught at times by some dress or parasol that shone like a wandering flower. But how little to him, he reflected, did the whole world mean now, when he suddenly saw with a start, amongst all these nameless figures, a dress which he thought he recognized. He was right. Mrs. Schilizzi was there. She was some fifty yards away; she was walking slowly. There were many people near her; but so far as Grenville could judge, she was without any companion. He hurried across the grass; he overtook her; he spoke to her. Again, as he did so, some of his old doubts returned, as to how she would greet him. The fantastic fear had seized him that the last four-and-twenty hours might have worked some complete change in her, that she would stare at him as if he were a stranger, and resent his approach

as an impertinence. And once again his fantastic fears were dissipated.

"I looked for you yesterday," she said. "I thought we might have seen you in the restaurant, or at the band in the evening."

He told her that he had purposely stayed away all the day.

"Well," she said, "I dare say you were right; but I wanted you so. I was feeling so depressed and lonely. Tell me," she went on quickly, "you're not going away again to-day, are you?"

"No," he answered, "of course not—not if I can be with you."

"You can be with me, I think," she said, "almost as much as you like. Paul has found some friends here—business friends from Vienna; and all yesterday afternoon he spent with them playing billiards in the café. He seems in quite a good humour, and was cross only twice—once about his breakfast, and once about his bedroom. But as for that, they've given him another now, not in the hotel itself, but in the *annexe*, over the café. He's delighted with that. He feels himself quite a bachelor. I told him you were here, and that I had met you at my aunt's. He had found out all about you soon after parting from you in the train; and so far as I can see he's rather proud of my knowing you. I told him too that it was through you I had heard of the hotel in the forest: you need therefore make no mysteries about it. He's here somewhere with some of his billiard-playing friends. I must introduce you, and you must come and breakfast with us at the restaurant. See, there he is. Come with me, and let us meet him."

A figure clothed in a suit of light lavender grey, and adorned by a brilliant flower, was now visible moving across the grass towards them. As it came nearer, there could be distinguished, in addition to the flower, the brightness of teeth revealed by a long smile, and then the restless gleam of two dark almond-shaped eyes. As all these details became more distinct, Grenville thought that Mrs. Schilizzi must have been somewhat mistaken as to the good-humour she had claimed for her husband; for the smile, which at a distance had seemed to corroborate what she said, was at a closer view far more like a grin of irritation, and said in advance to his wife, almost as plainly as if he had shouted it, "Who the devil is this you have ventured to pick up and to be talking to?"

But the moment he realized who her companion was his air changed, and his face took the very expression which a moment ago Grenville had falsely attributed to it.

"Ah, Mr. Grenville," he exclaimed, "delighted to come across you again! I didn't know in the train what a distinguished person I was travelling with. Mrs. Schilizzi tells me you have been of the greatest help to her. And then, too, you know the Princess. Ah, Mr. Grenville, charming old lady that is! Of course," he went on, not indeed taking Grenville's arm, but sidling along close to him, as if he would have liked to do so, "coming from Turkey as I do, your name is a household word to me. We hope you are going to bring us a new epoch of prosperity. The country, Mr. Grenville, wants only two things—sound finance and a railway system. You will give them the one; I have begun the other. We built a bridge last month out of the seats of an old Greek theatre—all of marble, and a third of the price of brick."

Grenville hardly knew in what way to comport himself; but instinct prompted him with the manner which reflection would have led him to cultivate. He was perfectly civil; he listened with an air of interest; but neither in look nor tone was there any trace of a wish to allow his acquaintance with his companion to approach the domain of friendship. Mr. Schilizzi, however, it seemed was entirely satisfied; and when Grenville had responded sufficiently to the above introductory observations, he at once went on to ask him about some racing stables which he heard were in the neighbourhood. Grenville was unable to give him any information; that subject therefore dropped. All this while they had been strolling in the direction of the hotel, and Mrs. Schilizzi now had walked on a little ahead of them. At the same moment there sailed past them a gorgeously-dressed lady, whose character, with a happy clairvoyance, Mr. Schilizzi recognized. He slightly nudged Grenville, and, with an air of furtive connoisseurship, "Did you see that?" he said. "That was a well-made woman."

"Paul," said Mrs. Schilizzi, looking back, "we breakfast at twelve, don't we? As you won't put up with the children's dinner, we shall now be obliged to go always to the restaurant; so I have told Mr. Grenville that if he likes he can share our table with us."

"Delighted," said Mr. Schilizzi. "I always say that at meals a *tête-à-tête* is a mistake. My dear, I should advise you

to go back to your rooms, or you'll never be ready for luncheon at twelve o'clock." Obedient to this airy sarcasm, Mrs. Schilizzi left them. Mr. Schilizzi looked round him, as if relieved by her absence. "This place," he exclaimed, "is not a patch upon Smyrna!"

"Indeed?" replied Grenville.

Mr. Schilizzi threw back his head, and half closed his eyes, in a parenthesis of ecstatic memory. "The girls there," he said, "if you know where to look for them—God bless me, you never saw such a thing! By the way," he went on, for a wonder changing the subject, "do you play at billiards? No? They've a new table here—an English one—cushions perfect. Schwabe and I were playing till eleven o'clock last night. I've found two of my friends," he went on, "undergoing a little of the waters—and, I fancy, a good bit of the wine—with whom at Vienna I do a bit of racing sometimes. My wife won't know 'em; and so, between you and me,"—Mr. Schilizzi's voice became easily confidential,—“they have not the opportunity of telling tales out of school. I've promised to meet them at half-past ten at the café. Ah—there they are, by Gad! Are you willing to join us?"

Grenville declined on some plausible pretext. Mr. Schilizzi waved a lavender glove at him, and grinning, "*Then au revoir!*" rapidly strode away, and soon had his hands on the shoulders of a couple of Semitic dandies.

"Certainly," Grenville reflected, as he wandered off alone, "in no sense other than a theoretical one have I done this man so much as the shadow of a wrong. I have interrupted no union that ever existed; or whatever there was to interrupt has long since ceased. The only union that exists between him and her—and there is one—may desolate my own life; but my life does nothing to disturb *it*. The case is quite the contrary. She, sustained by the consciousness of my friendship and constancy, will perform better all the duties, and the only duties, she owes him. She will bear with him; she will consult his welfare; she will be for him everything she has been, except being again a mother; and as for her love, poor child, if he ever thought he possessed it, it was merely because he cared for it so little that he never noticed its absence. Noticed its absence!" his thoughts repeated presently. "Do I not know that he actually would have resented its presence? No—to a man like that I have certainly done no wrong."

These considerations were his companions, as he rapidly moved along, and absorbed him so completely that he hardly knew where he was going, till he suddenly found himself in the deep quiet of the country, and realized that his steps had taken him, almost without his consciousness, to the river-side path leading to the well-known mill.

The whole scene was haunted for him with memories of certain moments—with images of the children playing amongst the flowers, and making a heaven on the green floor of the meadows, and the mounting movement both of his soul and of hers, towards an opening heaven of the spirit, of which childhood was an unconscious reflection. And other memories too mixed themselves soon with these, tearful and plaintive, like a drift of rain sweeping suddenly into the wind—memories of her entreaties that he would never despise or hate her. He remained for a long time motionless, leaning on a broken post, whilst his thoughts of the present were shifted under the influence of the past. The sense of relief brought to him by his study of Mr. Schilizzi's character slowly gave way to a sense of new anxiety, which already indeed had touched him, but which he had not till now quite realized. What he now began to ask himself was, How should he treat this man?

"We know little," he reflected, "when we enter on such a situation as mine, what problems it may in time reveal to us. It is like a plant whose thorns sleep in the sprouting stalk. It must root itself and grow in our lives till we really can know its nature. This man," he continued, "I can't be uncivil to him. Why should I be? On the contrary, I will, unknown to him, do him any good turn in my power. Only it must be unknown to him. I will never have him thanking me; and never from him will I take the smallest favour. And Irma—what of her? Does the situation to her seem as hard as it does to me? She appeared this morning to be such a complete mistress of it! I ought to think of her far more than of myself. My moral anxiety was just now too selfish. And yet, in a way, things are simpler for her than for me. However civil and friendly she may be to her husband, she is merely paying him what he may justly claim. He will not put, and he will not want to put, any interpretation on her goodness which would make it false or treacherous."

Thoughts are sometimes far more rapid than any possible record of them, sometimes far slower. In this case they were

far slower; and the stroke of a distant clock here warned Grenville that already it wanted only half an hour of twelve. He hurried back, mindful of his engagement for breakfast, half in eagerness to rejoin one of the party, half shrinking from the prospect of even apparent amity with the other. His way to the restaurant led him close to the café. The tall doors were open. In front of them were chairs and tables; and there, seated with an empty liqueur glass in front of him, and quietly winking an eye at a neat *demoiselle de comptoir*, with whom he was affecting to haggle over a few *kreutzers*, was Mr. Schilizzi basking in happy idleness. He called to Grenville, and, jumping up from his seat, swore pleasantly at the time, which was, he declared, past twelve, and hurried into the hotel, with somewhat of the air of a terrier, saying, "I must worry my wife out. She was never punctual in her life."

He presently reappeared, having accomplished this chivalrous purpose; and he, Grenville, and Mrs. Schilizzi were soon seated before some olives and sardines in the restaurant. Mrs. Schilizzi asked Grenville where he had been during the morning. He described the course of his walk, and the spot where he had stood meditating. The tone of his voice was as careless as tone could be; but a look in her eyes told him his words meant much to her. Mr. Schilizzi, it appeared, had devoted the same period to billiards, and announced that in the afternoon he was going with his friends to the racing stables. He had found out all about them, and proposed that his wife should accompany him. Watching the pair, Grenville was struck by two things—first, that this proposal on his part was a mere concession to civility, made without any wish or expectation that she would accept it; secondly, that she received it with an expression of weary aversion, and was on the point of returning to it some contemptuous answer. The next moment he saw that she controlled the feelings uppermost in her, and forced an acquiescent smile. "As you know, Paul," she said, "I don't care much about horses; but still, if you wish it, I shall be very happy to come."

"You will be, will you," said her husband. "Then all I can say is, that a minute ago you certainly didn't look it."

Grenville stared at him with a quick and painful interest. The man's glib voice still had its oily ring; but again it struck Grenville's ears as if some grit had got into it. It seemed in its rapid movement to rasp and grate; and the speaker eyed

his wife with a look of detecting sharpness, as if he had caught some elusive fault in her, and was impishly delighted with the capture. "My dear," he went on, "will you let us begin smoking? Mr. Grenville, try one of these cigarettes."

It was Grenville's impulse to refuse, but he had no excuse for doing so; and he eased his conscience afterwards by paying more than his share of the bill. Mr. Schilizzi meanwhile had turned away from his wife as if it were not worth his while to speak to her further about the drive, contriving, so Grenville felt, to make the dropping of his proposal an affront to her even greater than the annoyance he would have caused by insisting on it. Grenville hardly dared to look at her, he felt the situation so painful. He did, however, catch her eyes for a moment, and he saw they were moist with many conflicting feelings.

"Paul," she said, rising, "I am going up to the children. As you don't seem to want me really, I will sit with them somewhere in the gardens; but if you do, I am quite ready to go."

"No," he replied, with a sneer which ensconced itself in the corners of a smile; "I think, my dear, I can get on without you. Mr. Grenville and I will finish our coffee here."

As she went out, Grenville opened the door for her. "Bobby," she murmured to him sadly, "come to us this afternoon in the gardens."

He and Mr. Schilizzi sat together for a little longer; and he was pleased to find that, without giving any offence, he was able to make impossible even the first beginnings of intimacy. He was indeed pleased to detect, or at least to imagine, a certain contempt for him in his companion's tone, who said as they separated, "I fancy, Mr. Grenville, that you care for racing almost as little as my wife does."

Mr. Schilizzi was absent till nearly dinner-time. For a couple of tranquil hours Grenville sat in the garden with Mrs. Schilizzi and her children. He and she hardly exchanged a sentence which would, if written down, have hinted to any one that they were lovers; but a sympathy saddened and deepened by the consciousness of many unexpressed circumstances breathed in every tone and every look that passed between them; and no event attested by a hundred subpoenaed witnesses could have indicated a union closer and more com-

plete than this which would have baffled the eyes of the most censorious.

Mr. Schilizzi, when they all met again at dinner, had wholly forgotten the temper he had betrayed at breakfast. He was full of prospects, associated mysteriously with horse-flesh, which had blossomed in the course of his afternoon experiences; and his spirits showed themselves in the appreciation he expressed of his dinner, and in the quickness with which he praised and despatched many glasses of champagne. "Perhaps," he said, as the banquet drew to an end, "you will take my wife, Mr. Grenville, to listen a little to the band. I have one or two matters to settle with a couple of friends, which could not interest either of you." And putting down a handful of money on the table, "Irma," he said, "you and Mr. Grenville must settle the bill together."

Sticking his hat well on one side of his head, and tucking his cane under his arm, he hurried away and left them. Under the same trees where before they had sat together, they sat together once more, silently listening to the music; and they parted hardly knowing how the day had impressed them—whether by its strangeness, its union, or its estrangement.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

SEVERAL days passed like this. Mr. Schilizzi in his normal state was smiling and talkative, with a sort of fawning *bonhomie*; but at intervals, for a moment, some invisible provocation from his wife would turn his smile into a lurking vindictive sneer, and, to Grenville's ears, sharpened his words like needles. But these occasions were rare. The billiard-table and the gay ladies of the café, his sporting friends and their various sporting projects, occupied most of his time, and titillated him into complete satisfaction. As for his wife and Grenville, they daily spent hours together; but they were rarely alone, and they were rarely in any spot where they felt sufficiently at ease for unreserved conversation. Once or twice in some secluded path, forgetting herself for an instant,

she laid her arm on his arm, but as instantly she withdrew it, shrinking to a distance from him. He too once or twice for an instant had been betrayed into some like familiarity; and she had not only shrunk from this, but reproved him for it in an indignant whisper. She seemed to Grenville to be like a moon still shining for him; but a moon that was gradually eclipsing itself behind hazy gathering clouds. Apart, however, from the constraint for which they themselves were responsible, none was due to the action of Mr. Schilizzi. As to what his wife did, he seemed wholly indifferent, except when some incalculable trifle evoked his resentful grin at her.

At last, however, a curious change came over him. Sunday arrived, and though there were few English visitors, a stray English clergyman had organized a service in the reading-room. To this Mr. Schilizzi, for some reason or other, thought it incumbent on him to go; and having discovered that his wife had a new dress with her that pleased him, he insisted that she should array herself in this, and come with him to astonish the congregation. In the afternoon, when, having discarded his tall hat and his prayer-book, he descended from his bedroom, where he had been napping, to sun himself in front of the café, he saw his wife strolling across the *place* with Grenville. He had often, with perfect apathy, seen her do this before; but now a curve of vindictiveness at once showed itself on his nostril, and hurrying up to her, he said in a tone that was like a bite, "My dear, the sun is a great deal too warm for you. If you can postpone till dinner your conversation with Mr. Grenville, I'll see myself that you have a walk as soon as it gets cooler."

"It *is* hot," said Grenville with ready tact. "Mrs. Schilizzi herself was saying so, just as you came up."

"It's not often," he replied, "that her judgment agrees with mine. Come, Irma, come back to your sitting-room. Mr. Grenville, we shall meet at dinner."

At dinner the unpleasantness had completely passed away; and Grenville was again left afterwards to listen with Mrs. Schilizzi to the music.

"Paul," she said, "has been in a dreadful temper. He's been asking me what I mean by making myself so conspicuous with you; and my arm—do you know, at first I resolved that I wouldn't tell you—is above the elbow black and blue from his pinching it."

"What," asked Grenville, after an expression of sympathy, "what is it that has put him out so suddenly?"

"I think I can tell," she said. "This dress I have on to-day—it's a great deal too smart for the place—but it struck him how pretty I look in it; and he heard, in the hall or somewhere, a Russian Grand Duke admiring me. I knew exactly what passed in his mind; I have noticed in him the same thing so often. I became at once, for the time, a valuable possession in his eyes, and he was determined to show me off as his own exclusive property. He doesn't want me himself; and as long as nobody else does, he never would care if I lived and died alone; but the moment he is reminded that other people may admire me, he likes to take me about in order that they all may stare at me, but is perfectly furious if I give even a smile to them. This afternoon," she went on, "he waited till the gardens were full, and then he walked me about wherever the crowd was greatest, as if he were a peacock, and as if I were his tail. I was so nervous, for whenever I turned my head, I felt his eyes were on me; and he said 'Who are you looking at?' However, as you see, he is perfectly quiet now; he was angry with me on your account for no reason personal to yourself; and if you will not be out of reach to-morrow morning, before you hear from me, we may perhaps have a pleasanter day than those we have been passing lately. If this is so, you shall have a note by ten o'clock."

She was as good as her word. The note arrived punctually, and the news and the proposal conveyed in it were far beyond Grenville's hopes. Mr. Schilizzi and his boon companions would be absent the whole day, at a town some thirty miles distant, attending a sale of horses. They had, in fact, started already; and she proposed that Grenville should take her and the children to visit once again the hotel and the hunting-lodge in the forest. They went. They picnic'd in the lodge. The children were wild with happiness, and were allowed, under Fritz's care, to disport themselves for an hour or so in the forest. Grenville and Mrs. Schilizzi were left alone. They had not been alone there since those far-off enchanted days, when the very walls around them had become part of their lives. A sense of those days was filling the room now, like incense from some smouldering censer; the silence was musical with memories; a chasm full of pain and discord

suddenly disappeared and closed, and the present made its peace with the past.

"Irma," he said to her, shortly before the return of the others, "do you believe now that I can ever—ever go away from you?"

"I don't know," she answered, looking with a sad smile at him. "I'm afraid that very often you will be obliged to do so."

"Perhaps if separation can be produced by intervals of miles and days; but I shall never be really parted from you until you desire to part from me."

"Nor I, Bobby, from you. I don't know if I am glad or sorry for it. Tell me this—is there nothing that you feel sorry for? Don't look pained, dear. Is it odd of me to ask you that question? Is not this the best of times to ask it, when I know you can never be angry with me, and when my soul is bare to yours?"

"I wish," he said, "to be honest with you. I will, then, confess this. There is something within me which is always, always asking that I, alone and personally, for all the happiness you give me, may make, by some secret pain, a constant atonement to something."

"Bobby," she said, "my own one—I am doing that already."

"Irma," he exclaimed, "you spoke just now of my being angry with you. Have I been angry often? I know I have been sharp and hard to you, and my thoughts have been even harder than my words. I wonder if you can guess why? Sometimes you seem to take yourself so very far away from me, and I wonder if you were ever near. I know there are reasons for your behaving thus; but I can't always feel them, and you sometimes take me by surprise. Listen—let me give you this—these few lines, which I wrote one night when I was thinking about you. I see the children outside—read it before they come in."

She took the paper from him and read—

"Does there seem anger in my voice and glance,
Ever? Or worse—mistrust? If this should be,
Forgive me, for the dust of circumstance
Blows in my eyes, and makes them not to see.

"Forgive me, you who every day are dearer!
I see the breast on which I long to lean,
So near, yet every star in heaven is nearer,
And all the winds of twilight sweep between."

She gave him the paper back with a gentle responsive smile. The children's voices in the passage prevented any answer; and the veil of common cheerfulness fell once more over both of them. During the drive home, gradually becoming weary, she for one moment leant her cheek on his shoulder; and, with one plaintive look at him, she removed it again so quickly that the act would by any observer have been attributed to the jolting of the carriage.

Mr. Schilizzi returned for dinner that evening. Grenville was struck by his humour, which was curiously sharp and taciturn, and set it down to some annoyance connected probably with horses. But this explanation seemed hardly to account for the fact that when dinner was over he stuck to his wife's side for nearly an hour at the band, and only left her with Grenville just as the performance was ending, and did even this only so as to exchange a word with a friend.

"He," said Mrs. Schilizzi, the moment he was out of hearing, "he is furious again with me. I told him I had been for a drive with you. He stamped, and grinned, and swore at me. I thought for the moment he was going to knock me down."

"What has made him like this?" Grenville asked hurriedly. "Has he lost some money, or has anything else annoyed him?"

"No," she said, "it's jealousy. He's beginning to think I like you."

"Do you think it would really pain him to know you did?"

"Pain is the wrong word. It would, I believe, infuriate him. It is odd that it should be so, as he cares nothing for me. Nothing could annoy him more than my affection for him, unless it were my affection for somebody else. See—he is coming. Good-night. How pretty that last waltz was!"

He watched her as she left him and walked away with her husband. "What a horrible thing," he thought, "that law, custom, or anything should give this brute the remnant of a right to feel thus." He had seen Mr. Schilizzi before she had—seen him taking his leave of that very lady the charm of whose figure had so commended itself to his taste in the gardens. Grenville had never till now allowed himself, even in thought, to speak violently of Mr. Schilizzi. He had felt it a point of honour to restrain or repress his judgments of

him. But now that face which, from the first moment he had seen it, he had never seen without aversion, presented itself to his mind with an importunate and repulsive vividness; and things which he had hardly noticed began to impress themselves on his mind—the unwholesome tinge of yellow which had come into the dark complexion, the tightening of the skin about the eyes, telling its tale of dissipation, and the animal curves taken by the plausible restless lips.

CHAPTER XXIX.

GRENVILLE went to bed that night hardly knowing what to expect. Early next morning he received the following note—

“Paul and I are going to-day for an expedition—to the place where he went yesterday, and on the same business. The same thing may possibly happen to-morrow. Dine with us as usual. We shall naturally be charmed to see you.”

The first thing that struck him on reading this was her use of the word “we,” identifying herself with her husband; the next was the blankness of the prospect that thus opened up before him. One whole day, and very probably two, had had in an instant everything sponged out of them, except the burden of so many intolerable hours. He found this burden greater than even his fears had anticipated; and the worst came to the worst; there actually were two days of it. Even the meeting at dinner, which he longed for from early morning, desiring it like a water-brook in the desert, when it came was an aggravation of his pain. Mr. Schilizzi to him was glib and civil as ever; but as for her, instead of being civilly distant, and softening her distance now and then with a smile—instead of behaving thus, which he was already prepared for—she treated him in a way which struck him as gratuitously repelling. She affected complete indifference to any topic he started, and if ever she noticed his opinions, it was either to question or to contradict them.

For the first night he bore this without even a mental murmur; though when after dinner she refused to listen to

the band, declaring that music bored her, and that she was going to rest on her sofa, he felt in his heart the movement of bewildered bitterness. But the second night, when all these experiences were repeated, when on meeting him at dinner her voice had no tone of welcome, when her eyes never forgot themselves in a single relenting look, and when she not only contradicted any opinion he expressed, but actually seemed to resent it from the very fact of its being his, though he struggled to think that she was still doing violence to her wishes, his powers of belief grew restive under the growing strain that was put upon them, and at last refused any longer to supply him with this difficult comfort. His own manner underwent a complete though subtle change. He did not for a moment become discourteous or even brusque. On the contrary, his conversation became what a stranger would have thought brighter. But his remarks glittered, and their points took an added sharpness, because by a silent process they froze and crystallized into cynicism.

This had one result which was entirely unexpected. Mr. Schilizzi, without knowing why, found himself thinking Grenville a really pleasant companion, and began, as he finished his fifth glass of champagne, to show his appreciation by a variety of vivacious innuendoes, the meaning of which was generally illuminated by a wink. At last, as he looked round the restaurant at the end of one of these sallies, Grenville noticed that his eyes suddenly fixed themselves. He noticed also what the object was which had arrested them: it was the lady with the fascinating figure. As for her character, there could be no doubt about it—though it was one which with charitable irony the world would describe as doubtful; and Grenville felt as certain as if the whole story had been confessed to him, that she and Mr. Schilizzi were already on the best of terms with each other. Presently she swept by, fanning herself, and diffusing zephyrs of patchouli; and as she went Mr. Schilizzi's travelling eye followed her movements between eyelids almost closed. Then for five minutes he seemed unnaturally interested in his dessert. He peeled a pear for his wife, and talked to her with persistent attention. Then he looked at his watch, and exclaimed with a most creditable start, "By Gad, Irma, I wonder if you know what time it is? I must hurry off instantly to meet Schwabe and Silbersheim. What will you do?"

He looked doubtful, and frowned for a moment.

"Hang it all!" he said. "You'd better wait at the band for me; and Mr. Grenville will see that nobody comes and eats you. Suppose we ask him whether he thinks you'd be tender."

Grenville and Mrs. Schilizzi once again were alone together; but a few conventional words about the music and the warmth of the evening were all that for some minutes they found themselves able to utter, and their tone in doing so was one of polite indifference. She was the first to inaugurate any change; and the change, when she did so, was from indifference to actual hardness.

"The music," she said, "interests you as little as it does me. If you meet my husband, will you tell him I have gone in?"

As she spoke she half rose to go; but with an exclamation, violent although under his breath, Grenville stopped her.

"If you go," he said, "I conclude you will go for ever. I myself shall leave Lichtenbourg to-morrow."

She looked at him, not with kindness, but still with a start of quick involuntary alarm.

"What," he went on more gently, "what is the use of my remaining here, if all day long I am never to have a sight of you, and when we meet you resent every word I utter?"

"Have you," she retorted, "no sense of my position—none—absolutely none?"

"Indeed," he said gently, "I have every sense. Surely you might trust me not to distress or embarrass you?"

"Stop, stop!" she exclaimed. "Don't go on talking about it; if you do I shall scream. Can't you let me alone? Well—to-morrow I'm going no more expeditions; you may, if you like, meet me in the gardens at eleven. Bobby, you must come. You don't know how all this is killing me. I have to go in now, I'm so tired. Good-bye till to-morrow; and then, if you can, tell me you don't quite hate me."

Her strange changes of feeling struck him differently at different times. Sometimes they seemed the result of some deep but troubled principle, trying pathetically to adjust itself to the stress of untried circumstances; though it was a principle to which as yet he had found no complete clue. Sometimes they seemed the caprices of mere emotional selfishness. But to-night he retired to rest convinced at least of one thing,

that, despite whatever it cost her, she was still true to him. When he came to meet her in the garden, she was there before her time ; but he was conscious of a momentary annoyance at seeing that she had brought her children. As soon, however, as he sat down by her, she told them to go and play ; and then, mindful of her last words at parting, he murmured to her timidly some phrase of affection.

Her answer was a new surprise to him. He could hardly believe his ears. Averting her head, with a concentrated repulse in her accent, "Don't," she exclaimed, "don't say a word of that kind. Don't touch me ; don't come near me ; don't say a syllable that may even suggest that you are fond of me."

In faltering, bewildered sentences, he asked her what was her meaning.

"Last night I was ill," she said. "I hardly could sleep at all ; and I lay awake hating myself more and more, till the morning. If I go on seeing you much, I believe I shall have brain-fever. Why don't you go away ? It's unkind of you staying on here. I wish you'd go, and then perhaps I shall be at peace again."

"Go ?" exclaimed Grenville. "Do you really wish me to go ?"

He stared at her. She said, "Yes."

"Then I will," he answered quietly. "I will go this afternoon."

He could hardly believe even now that she would take him at his word ; but in a slow, low voice she said,

"I think it would be better. Of course if it is inconvenient to you, you could put it off till to-morrow. Paul is unwell this morning. He's in bed with a chill or something, so as far as he is concerned, your presence would make no matter." Then after a moment or two, with a little quiver of her lips, "I don't want you to go," she said. "I suppose I don't know quite what I do want. And yet, yes—I do know. Go—and go to-day."

"And for how long ?" he asked. "Do you mean for ever ?"

"Oh," she said irritably, "don't trouble me with questions. No—not for ever. Surely you can go to the Pasha's, and when I want you again, I can write and tell you. When you come back, we may be able to make things different."

"Very well, Irma. And will you be happy without me ?"

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"I shall have you again by and by," she said more calmly. "And we may be able to put things then on a different plane. You know what I mean. I need not speak more clearly."

"You speak of that, Irma, as if it were very easy. I didn't know that human nature was so simple."

"Perhaps," she said, "women and men are different. I think it would be easy for a woman."

The words were few, but they sufficed to astound Grenville. Why this should be so he at the time hardly knew; but he was conscious of a shock that set all his thoughts reeling. He tried to answer her; but at first he could command no words. He rose abruptly, and in silence held out his hand to her. She merely looked gravely at him.

"Low as my plane is," he said at last, "will not you stoop to it even to say good-bye? I am going to make my preparations. I shall not be here to-night."

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"To the Pasha's, if I find he will have me. I shall send Fritz with a note. If he won't have me, I will go back to the Princess. I will keep out of your way till I have gone; and I shall not return, or trouble you with letters, till you write to me."

He raised his hat, turned on his heel, and went. He sent his note; but whilst waiting for his servant's return, he hardly knew in his distraction what to do with himself. He resolved on a long walk. But what walk should he take? Every road he knew was haunted with memories of Irma; and "sorrow's crown of sorrow" would be hanging on every tree. He did at last, however, hit on an unknown route—a path that led him away into some ragged tracts of wood; and sitting on a prostrate trunk, he brooded in restless bitterness. What the pain at his heart was, was still partly a mystery to him. Was this, he asked himself, to be the end of all that love, for the sake of which he had surrendered everything, and in a moral as well as in a material sense, taken his life in his hand? Was this to be its ignominious end? A picture confronted him of his possible ghastly folly; but the pain that was now tormenting him could not be explained by this. There was something else, something worse, below the surface, churning the waters of his misery. At last he realized what it was; it was the following thought.

She had said it would be easy to her to alter the character of their relations. What pained him was not the thought that she should wish to alter it, nor even that she would find it easy to do so ; but the thought of the new light which, if to alter it were so easy, would be thrown on her character in having ever yielded to it. Her self-surrender to him had been hitherto in his eyes transfigured, redeemed, and glorified by what he believed to be its intensity and its completeness. It represented to him some overwhelming need of her nature—some profound movement of her soul. But now, even supposing he regarded her conduct as a sin, the ease with which she said she would amend it, instead of making him think any better of her future, forced him to think incalculably worse of her past. If she could go back so lightly to the paths of technical virtue, how much more lightly, how contemptibly, she must have acted in ever leaving them. Terms came into his mind, offering themselves as suitable to such a woman, the very thought of which he winced at, and which his will would not suffer to be applied. Little by little his feelings found an outlet which to many natures no doubt may seem false and artificial, but which to a man of his temperament is absolutely natural and spontaneous. His wretchedness began to express itself in rhyme and rhythm ; and these brought to him the same sort of relief that a cry or a groan brings to one suffering physical torture. He wrote the verses down in pencil on a torn envelope, and again and again read them. They were these—

“The world was bright with many a prize,
Of power and pride for me.
I looked at thee with dreaming eyes,
And left the world for thee.

With wakened eyes, with eyes bereft
Of dreams, I see thee now.
The emptiest prize I spurned and left
Was not so vain as thou.

I will go back to power and pride !
Ah no ! too late I see
That all the world is dross beside
My broken dream of thee.”

Heavy at heart, and moving like a man wounded, he dragged himself slowly, after an hour or two, back to Lichtenbourg. Even in his wretchedness one thing delighted him.

He saw Fritz at the hotel door, with a carriage and with luggage in readiness. He knew, therefore, even before an effusive note was handed to him, that the Pasha would be delighted to welcome him, and without a moment's delay he took his seat and departed. He was a prey during the journey to two alternate impulses—the one, an impulse to complete his accusation and conviction of her, and so far as possible to shake himself free of her memory ; the other the impulse to justify her, and explain her conduct by attributing it to something too high for his comprehension. He struggled to imagine himself living happy without her. He said to himself that the world had other women as charming ; and in especial he bethought him of the eyes and figure of Miss Markham. But he had hardly consented to harbour this last image, when he drove it away in disgust and repentant sorrow ; and mentally abasing himself at the feet of Mrs. Schilizzi, confessed and asked pardon for this act of despairing treachery. This mood was hardly less painful than the other, but it was a mood which braced him with a sense of self-respect.

“Whatever, Irma,” he murmured, “may be thought of my devotion for you, I will shame the most saintly lover that ever lived by its fidelity.”

Gradually his thoughts once again began to shape themselves into verse, which gave him some satisfaction by its sympathetic cadence ; and at last, producing a note-book, he scribbled down these lines—

“You may, if you will, till I die, leave me friendless ;
But I still shall go dreaming aloof and alone,
That at last, in the life or the sleep that is endless,
I shall breathe on your bosom, for ever your own.”

No verses, however, not a whole volume of them, could have eased his breast of the physical pain oppressing it, or have made him, by the time he reached the Pasha's castle, able to meet the world with anything but distaste and weariness.

The guests since he was there last had neither increased nor diminished in number. So far as he had considered the matter, he had secretly hoped they might have increased ; for new faces would at any rate be a sort of distraction ; and the more people there were present, the fewer he would have to talk to. But the Pasha, with Lady Ashford, the Baroness,

and Miss Markham, formed just such a party as would compel him to exert himself, or make him, if he failed to do so, seem either rude or peculiar. Lady Ashford indeed, by whom he sat at dinner, did, after asking him many questions about his prospects, and lightly remarking, "I suppose you have not yet found your affinity," actually add, "Mr. Grenville, tell me what's come to you? you seem quite to have lost your spirits. Have you found your affinity after all?"

"If I had," he said laughing, "I should have found my spirits, not lost them. I have not been very well," he went on, feeling bound to offer some explanation, "and the stomach affects the spirits quite as much as the heart does. I'm afraid after this wonderful dinner it will treat me worse than ever, unless you distract me, as you are sure to do, from our host's truffles and *foies gras*."

"His plates interest me," said Lady Ashford, "so much more than his *plats*." And then conversation, to Grenville's relief, flowed into a safe channel. The plates were Sèvres, superb in colour and gilding—they formed an excellent subject of small-talk; so did the fruit dishes and other ornaments of the table, including a gold fountain which sputtered scent in the middle; so did the collection of huge gilded salvers, which gleamed on a side-board like so many harvest moons. The servants too attracted Grenville's quick social observation—especially the footmen, whose stockings were as red as sealing-wax, and two Oriental attendants, in turbans and loose trousers.

In the evening they all of them played billiards. The jewelled scimitars made flashing fireworks on the walls. The two Oriental figures appeared every ten minutes, with superfluous repetitions of Turkish coffee and liqueurs. The aroma of cigarettes went through the air pungently. Every one smoked but Lady Ashford. The Baroness puffed like the chimney of a small steam-engine; and Miss Markham's lips, with a slow and dainty softness, emitted a mist of silver from between their fastidious coral.

Grenville's part in the scene was little more than mechanical. He was just conscious that now and then Miss Markham seemed bent on showing him, not only the beauty of her play, but that of arms and wrists. He knew that people spoke to him. He knew that he answered when he was spoken to, and that he tried to make conversation. But of what he said he was only half conscious; his own voice made

no sound in his ears ; and the voices of the others were merely like faint noises in a dream. The Pasha, when the ladies retired, suggested that he should come to the smoking-room ; but on plea of fatigue he excused himself, longing to be again alone—alone, so as to drop the smothering mask of gaiety, to groan if he pleased instead of forcing laughter ; and, if he could, to lose himself in the peace of sleep, hoping that to-morrow might bring him some note from Lichtenbourg.

He little knew how strong his hope was, till the post arrived without a line for himself, and killed it. He imagined that he had expected this. He imagined that he was prepared for it ; but when the disappointment came, it struck him like some treacherous blow. "How can a woman be so cruel ?" he exclaimed to himself ; and, smarting under this thought, his nature swerved in revolt from her, struggling to recover its independence. This was in the morning, an hour before the mid-day breakfast ; and, during this hour, as he sat alone in his room, he found that his mind, with a kind of defiant longing, was looking forward to again meeting Miss Markham. Even to think of Mrs. Schilizzi had suddenly become so painful that, as a man whose clothes are on fire might plunge instinctively into water, he felt himself instinctively impelled to soothe himself by some distraction. Such being the case, Miss Markham's various fascinations, which he was hitherto hardly aware that he had noticed, or which, if they had occurred to him, he had pushed contemptuously out of his consciousness, suddenly now came back to him, and he let his imagination dwell on them. How would she be dressed ?—for her dresses were always changing. How would she look at him through her long dark lashes ? How would her lips, like a parted rosebud, speak to him ? What hat would she wear ? What would be the colour of her gloves ? With what shoes would she emphasize the arch of her dainty instep ?

He was conscious of a miserable and perverse impatience to see her again ; and he found himself entering the hall—the usual place of meeting—a good ten minutes too early. The masses of furniture bewildered his eyes at first ; and considering what the time was, he concluded the room was empty. But a coloured something moved against a background of screens and cabinets, and he realized that this actually was Miss Markham herself. She was sitting, when he caught sight of her, in a huge Florentine chair. She had apparently

been out of doors, for a dainty little hat was on her forehead, a jacket clipped her figure, and a delicate gloved hand indolently held a walking-stick. With the other she was pressing a pocket-handkerchief to her nostrils, seeming to find in its folds the subject of profound meditation. She did not stir when he entered, but with the magnetism of a quiet good-morning drew him towards her, and holding the handkerchief out to him, said, "Do you like this scent? Just smell it, and tell me."

"It's odd," he said. "What in the world is it?"

Miss Markham laughed. "Goodness knows," she said, "I don't. It's supposed to be worth ten guineas a bottle. Our host gave it me. Have you," she went on with a mischievous twinkle in her eyes, "have you seen the bottles in his bedroom? He is well able to spare it."

"I am not sure," said Grenville, "that I like it."

"I," said Miss Markham, speaking with a sort of velvety dryness, and employing a word which is hardly elegant in itself, but which came from her lips as if modelled in Dresden china, "I think it's *bestly*. Here, Mr. Grenville, I wish you'd take my handkerchief. Will you? I'll make you a present of it."

"I confess," replied Grenville, "it's hardly a flattering present."

"I hope," she said, "that at any rate you will dislike it less than I do. It makes me think of the Pasha. It will make you think of me. We're going to drive afterwards," she continued, "so I shall not take off my hat; but my gloves have so many buttons I may as well begin undoing them. Help me. There's no one coming. I've been out. I delight in walking."

Whatever Miss Markham was good at, she was not good at prophecy, for at this moment Lady Ashford and the Baroness entered; and Grenville was struck by the oddly different way in which, as it seemed to him, these two ladies greeted him. Seeing him as they did, standing close to Miss Markham, Lady Ashford, he thought, showed symptoms of marked pleasure; whilst every wrinkle latent in the face of the Baroness appeared to twitch with equally marked annoyance. The Pasha, however, entered, rubbing his jewelled hands, and every expression at once naturally changed itself. As if by magic a series of folding doors were flung open and the party went in to breakfast; but not even the breakfast, beginning with the choicest caviare and ending with bon-bons fresh from

the artist's hand, could medicine the face of the Baroness to its usual sinister complacency.

Struggling as he was for spirits, and half interested as he was in Miss Markham, Grenville still was conscious of a burning smart within him, and would still have been absent-minded, if his curiosity had not been roused by the bearing of those two elder ladies. In the course of the afternoon it was more or less satisfied. The object of their drive was the identical old castle which he had first heard of at the Princess's, and visited on his first morning at Lichtenbourg. Here, for a certain time, he found himself alone with Lady Ashford; and he felt convinced from what she said, though she did not speak very plainly, that the Baroness, who was entirely under the influence of the King of Moldavia, was anxious to promote the intimacy between him and Miss Markham; whilst Lady Ashford believed the King's caprice to be evaporating, but was staying with the Pasha, and probably outstaying her welcome, in order to offer her niece any protection that might be necessary.

"Can't you," asked Grenville, "take her back to England? Has she no mother or father to take care of her or keep her in order?"

"No," said Lady Ashford, "that's the worst of it. She's of age—she's just of age; and is, unfortunately, her own mistress. She has money too, and a most determined will of her own. If her family put her back up by any injudicious handling, she is capable of doing anything, and of snapping her fingers at the consequences. And yet," Lady Ashford continued, changing her tone, "she has the makings in her of really a fine character." Grenville did not believe this: he, however, forbore to say so. "Do you remember," said Lady Ashford, "how much you admired her at the Embassy? And she, too, was curiously taken with you. Have you forgotten our conversation that night, and some bits of philosophy I told you?" Grenville replied that he had not forgotten a word. "You may remember then," she went on, "my telling you that the woman who can love most deeply will never love her deepest till first she has loved in vain—that she only learns what she wants to give and get by finding out how much one man can neither understand nor give. Well—I believe, since I said that to you, Juanita Markham has been finding out the truth of it."

She added more in something the same strain, till a dim suspicion at last dawned on his mind of its being Lady

Ashford's hope that he might, in Miss Markham's affections, be willing to seize on the throne which the monarch was preparing to abdicate. To entertain such an idea in any serious sense never for an instant occurred to him; but the belief that Lady Ashford entertained it, to a certain degree flattered him, and gave a fresh impulse to the bitter recklessness of his mood. A sort of spurious good spirits came to him as they drove back, and without hesitation he complied with his host's proposal that they should enjoy before dinner a private cigarette in the smoking-room.

In doing this Grenville was doing a real work of charity. The Pasha's experiences and opinions were so wide and so comprehensive, that there were only a few of them which, with all his happy audacity, he was able except in confidence to communicate frankly to ladies. He often therefore earnestly desired a man, to whom he might unbosom the exuberant riches of his nature; and Grenville presently found how sincerely his presence was appreciated. The Pasha, unlike many meaner conversationalists, made no effort at anything indecorous. No effort was needed. His conversation flowed easily like a sunny and babbling stream; nor had he any narrow contempt for jokes or anecdotes that were innocent. He was never bitter; he was constantly humorous; and although there was nothing on which he shrank from expatiating, his language was never coarse, because nothing seemed coarse to him. He touched pitch without the smallest fear of defilement. The generalization at which he arrived finally was this—that no attachment was ever Platonic at its beginning. “No, no, no,” he laughed. “You English are purists; and if you only saw things as they are, you would be delighted with what I say. What can be better? Love is an upward progress—an ascent towards the divine, not a descent from it. Your Platonic affection—you can always have that afterwards. Consider you now our esteemed friend the Baroness. We may speak of her history freely, for all the world is acquainted with it. With the King of Moldavia now she is absolutely—absolutely Platonic, and—how do you English phrase it?—unselfishly devoted to his interests. Good!—but then of course she was *au mieux* with him to begin with. You understand? You see my meaning?” said the Pasha, extending his forefinger, and screwing up his eyes in triumph, like a statesman confiding some astute consideration of policy.

To Grenville these chance words were a revelation, though hardly a surprise. The history which, according to the Pasha, all the world was acquainted with, he had never heard before ; and it turned into a certainty what before was a surmise merely—that the Baroness was the King's accomplice.

In any other mood the whole situation would have revolted him. He would have been revolted by the sense of being himself connected with it. But just as physical pain of one kind may make a man insensible to others, so the mental pain which still burnt under the surface made Grenville insensible to what otherwise would have caused in him a moral nausea. His aim was not to think. His aim was to escape from thought ; and again he turned at dinner for distraction to Miss Markham. He began to be conscious of a new sort of attraction in her. That she was good, or refined, or elevated, he never for a moment thought. He could not even pity her as the object of the machinations of the Baroness ; but all the same she interested him as being in some ways a riddle. Her manner was refined, though he never believed she was. There was a dainty quiet in it. Her sense of humour was keen, but completely under control ; and when it lit up her face it struck him all the more from her eyes being in general soft and almost sombre with melancholy. "What," he asked himself, "does she think of her king? Does she feel his desertion? Is she capable of feeling anything? And yet, whatever she is, that girl is in one way genuine. She has the courage of her own desires ; and the world will never interfere with her. She looks," he thought presently, as he let his eye rest on her, "preoccupied as to how she can best go to the devil."

After dinner she affected him still more powerfully ; though in yielding to her influence he felt like a man throwing himself into the sea. She sang. He remembered her voice as he had heard it at the Embassy. It penetrated, it thrilled through him now, as it never had done then. Its liquid tones seemed to vibrate with a passion committed to a music which was but another form of itself. Some music suggests a rising in the air. Hers suggested to Grenville a fathomless sinking in the sea. "Let me live my life out!" He instinctively put these words to it as a kind of mental libretto. "Let me live my life out, no matter how soon, but completely ; and then, let the mountains fall on me, let the rocks cover me!" He

shuddered as he listened : he felt that the effect on him was horrible ; yet he moved to the piano, and stood by the singer fascinated. When she had finished he begged her to sing again ; but looking up to him with a faint provoking smile, "No," she said, "I am tired. These windows open on a kind of platform or balcony : I am going out to get my breath in the moonlight." He opened the window for her, and they went out together. He felt as he did so as if his good angel was deserting him. She came close to his side, and leaned with him over the parapet. "How cool," she said, "and how restful. These shadows are soft like swan's-down." She turned her eyes to his. They seemed to him now like jewels, now like nocturnal flowers with dew on them. Before many minutes had passed, the girl, quietly mistress of the situation, was holding his hand in hers. He had yielded to the magic of her touch ; and yet, deep in his heart he felt there had been plunged a dagger. But his heart appeared to him hopelessly far away, disappearing out of sight in some dark depth of his being. At this moment, whatever had become of his good angel, a bad one appeared, who performed a good one's function. It was the Baroness, who said they were wanted to play billiards. Grenville at all events had no need to be told twice ; and, by and by, when he found himself alone in his room, his mind was racked by one and one only hope—that the following day a letter might come to him from Lichtenbourg.

The day came, and the hour of the post's arrival. As he waited for it, yesterday, and Miss Markham, and every interest relating to her, were all forgotten by him in a mental meeting of extremes—intense and breathless hope, and anticipated despair. Fritz entered his room with a letter. Grenville's heart beat violently. He seized the letter. It was a bill. There was nothing else for him. Helpless misery descended on his heart like an avalanche. Then again, as before, his miserable heart rebelled, and its forces mustered themselves like those of the fallen angels.

Blankly staring from the window at the gardens and woods below, he saw in a winding walk a glimpse of Miss Markham's parasol. It was red. It reminded him of another of the same colour ; and with a bitter ejaculation, for a moment he turned away. Presently he went back to the window. What he looked for still was visible. He seized his hat. He descended to the garden, and met her. Her eyes brightened when she

saw him, and the light in them softly trembled under their shadowy lashes. She was not a great talker. She spoke of the air, and of the flowers, of which last she knew really a good deal, but which she seemed to value for their scent rather than for their colour, except in so far as their colour might be suitable to her own complexion. She made him pick her a rose. "Pin it," she said, "in my jacket for me." She fixed her eyes on him as she spoke; and whilst he obeyed her order, she very patiently dropped them. "I wish," she said, "we had not to go in to breakfast."

In the afternoon they rode together, though the Baroness opposed the arrangement, severely condemning its impropriety. But the Pasha informed her that such things were done in England. Lady Ashford confirmed the statement, and so there was no more to be said. In the evening there was again music; and though there was no retirement on the balcony, Miss Markham had the art of producing moments of privacy in a well-lit room where several other people were present. Gradually Grenville felt that her presence was acting on him like some narcotic, lulling the pains and doubts that were aching within him secretly. He slept better the next two nights; and though, when on the arrival of the post, he was wounded afresh each morning by finding that he had no letter, he felt that the personality of the woman near him was softly shielding his eyes from the vision of the woman absent. And yet to the woman near him he yielded himself grudgingly and slowly. He was never conscious of uttering one genuine thought to her. The thoughts which he did utter were mere guests in his mind, and most of them were not honoured guests. Still she had triumphed so far as to keep him constantly at her side; and his thoughts, it may perhaps be conjectured, were the last things she cared about. They were for her no part of the intimacy—they were little more than its coverlet.

The second of these two mornings she contrived a new stroke of generalship. Amongst other accomplishments she possessed that of drawing; and, instead of alluring him to meet her before breakfast in the gardens, she told him of a sitting-room, with a view, in one of the towers, and there she informed him she was going to attempt a sketch. He acted on the hint conveyed to him. He went with her to the room indicated; he helped her with her paints and pencils; but despite his assistance an hour passed away, and a few outlines were all that

the paper had to show for it. So far as Grenville was concerned, many men would consider that he had done little during that time for which he could reasonably reproach himself ; but at all events there had happened the following incident. By accident or design a miniature diamond brooch which held Miss Markham's dress round her slim throat became unfastened. "Fasten it for me," she said, with a little pout of her lips. She stood up before him, her eyes resting unflinchingly upon his ; and the next moment, with a melancholy deliberate languor, her lips had attracted his to them as if they had been some magnet. To Grenville's intense relief, from far with a faint hoarseness, at this juncture sounded the gong for breakfast.

She suggested that in the afternoon they should again seek their retirement, adroitly letting him know that they could do so without being observed. He met her at the foot of a certain winding stair, and by it they reached a landing out of which the room opened. The landing, however, was ill lit ; and it happened that in the dusk, out of several dingy doors Miss Markham went to the wrong one. Grenville followed her, and found himself in the very room—the bare room with the antiquated rude furniture—where he and Mrs. Schilizzi had had their meal together.

He started, and stood absolutely still. Miss Markham had withdrawn instantly, saying, "Our room is the next one," and had gone to it, expecting that he would follow. But for a minute or so he could not move. That empty room appeared to him like the tomb of all the hopes of his life—of everything that was beautiful or sacred in it. He did not dare to advance beyond the threshold ; but the voice of Irma spoke in the dusty air, and he saw her eyes full of dreams and aspirations. He closed the door reverently ; he pressed his hand to his forehead. When he rejoined Miss Markham she saw him a changed man. He little knew how the change betrayed itself in his face. It could have escaped the attention of no one ; but the cause of it was naturally unsuspected by her.

"Are you ill ?" she said. "Are you suffering ?"

He caught at the suggestion eagerly. "It's nothing," he said. "It's merely a sudden headache. I can hardly see. I must go to my room and be quiet. I shall be all right in an hour or two."

Miss Markham's face, like his, exhibited genuine feeling ;

but hers suggested annoyance far more than sorrow. When he closed the door she sullenly collected her materials. She sat with them lying in her lap, her dainty lips pouting ; and presently, undoing a button, she drew from her breast a locket. There was a man's portrait on one side and on the other a crown in diamonds. She looked long at it with a half-discontented smile.

CHAPTER XXX.

GRENVILLE meanwhile had secured for himself at least one luxury—solitude. The emotions of men and women show themselves in different ways. A woman suffering as he did would have cried or broken down somehow. He at first did nothing but sink into a chair by his writing-table, bite his lips, and listen to a sigh which he could not suppress, and which only quivered under his vain attempts to do so. He then took up a copy of an English newspaper, and with apparent interest began to glance over its columns. But in a moment or two he dashed it down, and a frown furrowed itself on his forehead. Lying on his table was his diary. He had written nothing in it for days. He now opened it, and hastily seized a pen ; and the paper was soon creaking under its quick vindictive strokes. "I feel," he muttered to himself, "as if my ink ought to be vitriol."

"I don't know," he began, "if hell is a real place : but if it is, I know the nature of its torments ; for during the last three days I have suffered them. They have nothing to do with hot tongs, or the fire-place. The fire and the burning iron are supplied by one's own soul. They consist of the sense of sin, together with the constant commission of it—and sin is the act of being separated from one's true self ; and also from that to which one's true self is devoted. If we were separated from this once for all, if one's belief in its value once for all died, then one might be at peace ; but in hell this belief is always coming to life again, only that one may feel the torture of again making oneself unfit for it. It is a never-dying, ever-

reviving death. This sounds like a fragment from some book of theology. It is really the literal confession of an ordinary man of the world, whose thoughts are busy immediately not with God, but a woman—and a woman whom, according to theologians, he has no business to love. But with an extraordinary fidelity this secular experience of mine embodies what theologians say. To me this woman represents everything that is good—everything that is high and beautiful; and knowingly and deliberately I have estranged myself from her, committing against her daily acts of treachery. And my will has consented. But here is the strange thing:—it has, as it were, consented against my will; and whenever this has happened—what monkish specialist will lend me an image savage enough?—a red-hot knife has gone through the tissues of my soul, cutting away from me all that in myself I respected, and leaving my life dead. Now for the first time in its fulness I know what guilt means. I remember a certain morning when I thought for a time I knew it. I thought I was convicted by my own conscience and abased before it. I know better now. What menaced me on that occasion, as if it were a sense of guilt, was really terror or distrust of an untried situation. For so far as this woman is concerned, I was absolutely true, absolutely single-hearted; and for the first time in my life I was beginning to realize what absolute devotion to another human being meant. Theologians and moralists may say of me what they like; but I swear by all that they think sacred, that a new inward light was that morning dawning on me. But now, if that light is darkness, how great the darkness is!

“Irma,” he continued, “I know that you have been strange and hard to me. You have tried me. But what of that? What must I be worth, if I could not bear such trials? How often have I said to you that I longed to suffer for you; and here at the first acute suffering I fall away! And yet—Why have you left me without a single word? Are you going to take your own way to heaven, without so much as saying one good-bye to me?”

Here his pen arrested itself. Seizing a piece of blotting-paper, he placed it on the page, and abruptly shut up the book; and having reflected for a few moments, he set himself to write a letter. It had no formal beginning. It ran thus—

"I want your opinion on a certain piece of writing, and I hope you will be good enough to read it through patiently. It is a communication from a man to a woman, made under circumstances which are sufficiently explained by what he says; and I want you to tell me, if you will, how you think it would affect a woman receiving it. Is there anything in it that would touch her, or appeal to her, or soften her heart towards the writer, if, having cared for him, she had subsequently driven him away from her? It runs as follows; I copy it out at length:—

"If you feel that your relationship with me sets you at variance with yourself, or lowers you in your own eyes, or destroys your peace, I will not ask you to let me again come near you. But I will ask you one thing, both for your sake and mine. In cutting yourself off from the past that we have shared together, even while you condemn it, be just to it.

"As for your own heart you can speak better than I can. What I want to do is to tell you about mine; for I can tell you about it some things which perhaps you hardly realize, and which will not only make you (so I venture to hope) think more kindly of me, but will also prevent your thinking too hardly of yourself. I want to lay bare to you all that I have become, and been, and am, so far as my life has relation to your own; and if in this you see anything that is good and true, I ask you not only to relent a little towards myself, but to remember that this truth and goodness is due to your influence, and is a reflection of your own nature.

"Well—as to truth, is not a man's truth to a woman shown by what he sacrifices in order to live true to her? Listen to this then. For your sake I have sacrificed everything. As to worldly advantages, I have retained only enough of them to keep me in such circumstances as admit of my being your companion. Forgive me for alluding to this. You know it. But I doubt if you do know how completely, in other matters, I have made a parallel sacrifice. I have made myself, for your sake, friendless except for you. I don't say that I did this voluntarily, but it has been the natural result of the affection with which you have filled me. Every one else has grown to me strange and distant. No—not every one. There are a few old friends, to whom still I could naturally have talked with confidence; but since I have known you, I have never done so. I have been filled with a sense that any

intimate thought of mine should be revealed to you only, and shared with you only. I have made myself for your sake, except for you, altogether alone. Whilst you remained with me, you more than made up to me for everything; but now that you have left me, I know how complete my loneliness is. Believe me, I am not exaggerating. Over every throb of my pulse, over every thought, over every look, I have kept watch, so that everything which is worthy in me might belong entirely to you; and all that was unworthy shrivelled away and disappeared. For your sake all my sense of aspiration revived; my intellectual interests became keen again. Why do I talk? You know it. Ask your memory.

"And now comes my question. Answer it. Am I so degraded and vile, that I am not fit to be near you? If you knew all, perhaps you would say that I am so; for I have not told you all yet. I am going to tell you now. I am going to confess to you. Do you know what I have done? As you drove me away, as you told me to rid you of my presence, I have tried—can I confess it?—I have tried to be unfaithful to you. Don't attach to that its extremest and worst meaning—what it means really is bad enough. The memory of you as you drove me away—how hard and cold you looked!—was intolerable; and I have been trying to obliterate your image by that of another woman. I have laid myself open with a deliberate recklessness to all the charms that beauty—that mere beauty—possesses, longing to be charmed by them into some desperate forgetfulness of you, as an opium-smoker longs to dream.

"What will you say to me now—me who boasted of my faith to you? Do not be too hasty. I have something left still to tell you—in fact I have two things left. Which shall I tell you first? I will tell you first—for I can do that in a moment—that all the time I was doing this I hated myself, and I never was so conscious of my duty to you as I was during this first, this only violation of it. You must believe me. What I say is absolutely true. So much for that; and now let me tell you the other thing. Though I tried to be charmed by this woman, she has not been able to charm me. My effort was all in vain. The pleasure that I felt in her company was torture more than pleasure. Your image would not be obliterated. It is part of me. I cannot get rid of it. I am yours, and yours always. Why do you drive me away

from you? If you do not scorn me for this degrading test to which I have put myself, you will see how it at least proves the strength of my love for you. And perhaps the very strength of my love will make you despise me yet farther. If it does, I have but one thing to ask of you. Grant me one final kindness. Let me see you once again; and when you are saying good-bye to me, disguise your contempt in pity. Is that a great deal to ask, considering our past? Does all our past mean nothing? Was it the idle dream of two wicked and faithless children, who get each other into trouble and then hate each other? This is not so I know, so far as regards me. I cannot believe that it is so, so far as regards you, when I remember the words your lips have whispered in my ears, your eyes with all your soul in them as they married themselves to mine, and the love that shone and revealed itself in all the transfigurations of your face.

"Do you know these verses? They are not mine, except that they speak my meaning—

" 'Ah, dear, but come thou back to me!
Whatever change the days have wrought,
I find not yet one lonely thought
That cries against my wish for thee.' "

This letter he sealed up in an envelope, on which he put no address, merely the word "Private"; but which, having written the following few lines to accompany it, he enclosed in another, directed in all due form.

"Dear Mrs. Schilizzi, forgive me for troubling you; but you will find, I think, that the enclosed belongs to you. It is evidently strictly private; so I enclose it in a sealed envelope, in order that, if by accident it fell into other hands, there should be no chance of its being read inadvertently. Pray examine it, and let me know of its receipt by the bearer.

"Sincerely yours, R. GRENVILLE."

Summoning his servant, he asked him to procure a horse, ride to Lichtenbourg, and deliver the packet personally. "It contains," he said, "important papers, and must be put into the lady's own hands. You must learn from her maid when she is disengaged, as it wants an immediate answer; and unless you can find her alone, and able to attend to the

matter, don't leave the papers at all, but bring them back to me. Fritz!" he said, recalling him, "should she happen to be out for the day, you had better remain the night, and come back to-morrow morning."

The rest of the afternoon passed anxiously. At five o'clock he presented himself in the drawing-room, silencing the inquiries of the others by declaring himself much better, but securing an indulgence for a certain abstraction and listlessness by letting the impression prevail that he still was suffering. And, indeed, as the hours wore on, he began to suffer in reality. All through dinner, whenever the door opened, he turned round nervously in expectation of a letter for himself, and the tension of his nerves increased at every fresh disappointment. Afterwards they went to the billiard-table, and he was asked if he were well enough to play. He began to fear that they might suspect his malady to be mental, and even—fear is so unreasonable—that they might actually suspect the cause of it. He accordingly made an effort, and laughingly took a cue. He surprised himself also by playing extremely well—only the smallest noise outside distracted him so completely that several of his best strokes he made with the wrong ball. At last the folding doors were opened with a crash. He dropped his cue. A servant with a tray came straight and quickly towards him, and on the tray was a letter. He felt that the others were observing him. Truthful as he usually was, he hid his confusion by saying, "It is a letter from the doctor in Lichtenbourg. It will keep. I sent my servant to him to get some directions about some medicine." He resumed his play, and though his spirits had really risen, he did his best to repress all signs of recovery.

The moment he was alone he tore the envelope open. It contained but these few lines: "You don't know what I have suffered since you left me. Are you coming back? Does your letter mean that? Will it be—could it be—to-morrow? As to your enclosure, my opinion of it is this—that a woman would have a heart of stone who was not touched by it."

Fritz next morning again had his work cut out for him. He was sent at eight o'clock to a town about three miles distant for a carriage. Grenville meanwhile wrote a note to his host, who was not an early riser, saying—and here most casuists would have acquitted him of untruth—that, although in his state of health there was nothing at all alarming, the

news he had received last night made him wish to return to Lichtenbourg. This note, which was garnished with every necessary civility, he did not send till he learnt that the carriage had arrived; and having waited to receive a polite message from the Pasha, he drove away from the castle as fast as the horses could take him, without the embarrassment of an adieu either to Miss Markham or to anybody.

At first his spirits were lifted beyond his own control. The air blew freedom in his face, and his only discontent was that he could not outstrip the carriage. But then presently, for some cause which he could not explain, his state of mind changed like a day rapidly overclouding. "Why should this be?" he asked himself almost angrily. "What is it that thus changes our moods so incalculably? Are we masters of ourselves? Or are we nothing—nothing more than an effervescence of succeeding thoughts, of which consciousness is the mere spectator?"

An unbidden change, at all events, did take place in him; and instead of looking forward to the meeting now so near, he began to look at himself, and examine himself from a new stand-point. He was conscious of the keenness of the pains he had lately gone through; but seeing that now they had disappeared so suddenly, he began to ask himself whether there was not something unreal in them, and something contemptible in the fact of his having made so much of them.

"Perhaps," he reflected, "when I am no longer divided from her, I shall find out that I no longer care for her. A fine condition I shall see myself in then. Nothing can redeem my conduct except the genuineness, the enduring quality, of my main motive. If I find that my motive fails me—if my affection, which I have fancied so serious, proves to have been a mere caprice, or a piece of sentimental self-indulgence, I shall hardly know which to do first—to fall on myself as a brute who has deliberately trifled with her life, or laugh at myself as the self-made pauper who has deliberately ruined his own. I sometimes doubt," he continued, "whether, after all, our conventional moralists may not be right, and whether a man who acts as I have done is ever sincerely unselfish—whether he will ever attest the love, of which he makes so much, by any serious sacrifice. For as to giving up fame and fortune—I can't tell; but it is just beginning to dawn on me that this may resemble recklessness more than heroism."

When he reached the hotel, however, these new and formidable misgivings were for the time, at all events, dissipated by an unlooked-for piece of intelligence. As he entered the hall the first person he encountered was Mrs. Schilizzi's maid, who was just coming out of the office. She started and smiled at the sight of him, and hastened up to him to say, that she had just been sent down by Madame to find if he had yet arrived; and that if he had, Madame hoped he would come and breakfast with her. "Where?" asked Grenville. There was something in the message that surprised him. "In her own salon," said the maid. This surprised him further, as, since the departure of the Princess, she had had all her meals in the restaurant. But he had no time to reflect. It was nearly twelve already, and, following the maid with a beating heart, the door of the salon was being presently opened for him, and Mrs. Schilizzi was rising from a sofa to meet him. There was a smile in her eyes, half reproachful and half deprecating, and in the drooping poise of her head there was something that pleaded timidly. They looked at each other for a moment or two without speaking. Then everything else gave way to gladness. They moved towards each other, she was close to him; but suddenly some influence seemed to arrest her gently. She took his hand meekly. There was no passionate embrace, but, hanging her head, she offered her soft cheek to his lips.

"Bobby," she began, with her eyes looking on the ground. She faltered. She naïvely showed how little she could command her words. "Bobby—I want to tell you something. Here—come—sit down."

They sat together on the sofa, and still she said nothing. He, with the tide of returning tenderness overwhelming him, put his arm about her and tried to draw her towards him. At first she yielded. Her eyes went out to meet his; and then, sharply but not roughly withdrawing herself, "Don't," she exclaimed, "don't—I can't bear it. Oh, Bobby, why do you distress me? Why do you tempt me to be so wicked?"

He was startled. Her reproach, which was one he had never heard before, coincided strangely with his late accusation of himself; but he was conscious of one thing which he had lately been induced to doubt—the reality of his own pain at the mere thought of having wounded her. All he could say was, "I don't know how to answer you. Forgive me."

"I suppose," she said, "you must think me very odd and capricious. When Paul is well and able to take care of himself, I don't so much mind what I do; but when he is ill I can't take advantage of that."

"Ill," he exclaimed, quietly moving away from her. "Irma, I quite agree with you. But you never told me he was ill."

"Didn't I? No, I suppose not. But he is; and both the children—they are poorly too. The doctor doesn't know yet what the illness is, but I have been very anxious, and busy too—nursing all of them. As for Paul, I annoy him if I am much in his room; but he likes me from time to time to go and take his orders. He finds I attend to them better than any one else; and if anything goes wrong, he has more pleasure in abusing me. But as for the children, I am with them nearly all day. If it hadn't been for this, I should have written to you sooner; and then," she added, looking at him with an odd smile, "in spite of everything I was expecting that you would write to me. Dear, sit away, please, a little farther still. I hear them. They are coming with the luncheon."

He asked her during the meal about the several symptoms of the invalids. The children, she said, seemed merely to have caught some chill—they were suffering from stiff necks, and had been ordered to keep their beds. Mr. Schilizzi had nothing so definite to complain of. "I fancy," she said, "it may be his liver, for he constantly feels drowsy, sometimes he is sick; and altogether he has no strength for anything, except to read novels as he lies in bed, to drink champagne, and to eat any delicacies he fancies; and this oddly enough the doctor lets him do. You see, Bobby, I have brought you back from your castle to meet nobody except a poor sick nurse—and even of her you will only see a little. And oh!" she exclaimed, suddenly changing her tone, "tell me this—I was so glad to see you, I had forgotten all about it. That other woman—tell me that you don't love her. You do! I believe you do! If you desert me now, you will kill me."

A waiter at this moment entered, and asked her if she could receive the doctor. "Of course," she replied, "instantly." And then, turning to Grenville, "I must ask you," she said, "to go. I shall be busy for I don't know how long. But if you will come back at five, I could see you for half an hour and give you some tea, and we could then speak about dinner. Good-bye. Don't wait a moment longer."

He went. He got rid of the hours as best he could. He was touched and troubled by her anxieties, but he could not feel unhappy. In the first place, the doubts which had tormented him during the drive, as to the reality of his own attachment to her, had been dispelled by his experiences in her presence. "Whenever I am near you," he said to himself, "all my doubts vanish. My life is absorbed in yours."

But these reflections were not his sole satisfaction. He had another and even deeper one, welling up from another source, and lifting him to a level of peace to which he had been long a stranger. The source was his sight of her in the middle of her trying duties. The mere fact of her performing them was hardly in itself remarkable; but the complete self-forgetfulness, the almost religious devotion, with which, from his knowledge of her, he saw she was giving herself to their performance, elated him with a consciousness of her depth of truth and goodness. She was vindicating his own judgment of her, when she had felt doubtful of herself. She was showing him that he had not been soothing his anxieties with sophisms when he told her that, whatever the world might think of her, whatever at moments she might be tempted to think of herself, her faith to him had not divided her from her duty to others, and that everything in woman which is true, and tender, and noble had been kindled and developed, not extinguished, by her loving him. He thought of that first expedition he made with her—of that drive to the Pasha's castle, and of the way she had impressed him by her sensitiveness to the beauty of nature—by her solemn and hushed delight in it. The suffering of those belonging to her seemed to touch her in a corresponding way. Just as beauty roused in her a craving prayer to appreciate it, so suffering roused in her an impulse of the same kind, to spend herself in the service of relieving it. As he left her room after luncheon he had met her maid in the corridor, who told him that for three nights Madame had hardly slept.

Returning at the time she mentioned, he found her awaiting him at the tea-table. She was flushed and agitated, and there was a trouble in her lips and eyes, exactly like that of a child lost in the crowd. "Oh, Bobby," she said, "I'm so glad you've come; and yet I don't know if I ought to allow you near me. Paul's illness has declared itself. It's the

worst form of diphtheria. If you're not afraid of me, sit down, and advise me. I'm half distracted."

"Afraid!" said Grenville with a laugh, which he saw was a spark of comfort to her. She smiled faintly but gratefully. She poured him out some tea, and then went on more slowly.

"The doctor suspected what was the matter, but he could not be quite sure, and he did not wish to alarm me. I've so much to tell you. Let me speak about Paul first. You remember a woman—don't you?—that he admired here. Well, even although my continued presence annoyed him, I should have been with him more than I have been, if the doctor had not informed me that this woman was his constant companion. Of course, neither Paul nor she had a notion of what was the matter with him; and he used to make her presents to induce her to sit and talk with him. Weak as he was, he used to laugh and chatter with her. But now, as the doctor says, of course she will not return—not only because of the danger, but because the symptoms are not agreeable. Poor creature!" she went on, "I was sorry to see him coughing. I've been wiping his lips and doing all sorts of things for him, but the worst of it is that the fact of my doing them seems in itself to irritate him. I don't mind for myself, but I could see it was so bad for him. He struggled to raise his voice in order to find fault with me—especially when for a second or two I think I must have closed my eyes, for I am very tired—and that did something to his larynx, and his cough got worse than ever."

"How is he now?" asked Grenville, hardly knowing what to say.

"The nurse is with him now. With her, I fancy, he will be quieter. When she came into the room he smiled at her; and to me, without looking at me, but as if he were speaking to his pillow, 'My dear,' he said, 'you can go.' I went. There was nothing else to do; and anyhow soon I should have had to go to the children. But now about them—do you know what the doctor says? What they have had has been just the same thing—diphtheria. It has, however, been a very mild attack; and now they are fast recovering. He knew about it before, and he told me not to kiss them, because, he said, they might give me a cold. He thought they would soon be well, and he didn't wish to frighten me. He's a kind man. But—oh, Bobby, tell me, do I bore you?"

She looked into his eyes searchingly. He tried to shape an answer, but his lips only trembled. She understood him. Her eyes told him so. She leaned towards him and continued. "All this," she said, "is only the preface to my troubles. The children, though they are supposed to be recovered, are still, according to the doctor, in a very delicate state; and the great thing for them soon—not to-morrow, perhaps, but next day—will be change of air. They will want most careful watching for weeks and weeks. The doctor has lent me a book. For the last ten minutes I've been reading it; so far as I can see, it may be two months before we can be sure that they are strong again. Tell me—what am I to do? Where am I to send them? And must I go with them too? It would kill me to leave them; but then—Bobby—can you tell what I am thinking of? If I don't leave my children, I shall have to desert Paul. Give me your advice. Help me. Think for me. I am bewildered."

"I should like," said Grenville, "to share all your troubles, except your bewilderment. It is lucky I don't share that. I think your course is clear. Your children require you far more than your husband does. At all costs you ought to remain with them."

She walked to the window, turning her face away from him. He watched her. He heard a slight sob, and a slight movement showed that she was gulping down some emotion. Returning to him with swimming eyes, "Ah," she said, "but I feel this." She came close to him. She laid her face on his shoulder. "I feel this," she went on with difficulty. "I have never wronged my children, but I have wronged Paul; so I want to repay him over and over again." She looked up at him with a sudden momentary smile. "I shall make myself in that way more worthy of you. Don't be shocked at what I say. I dare say you don't agree with me; and so far as my thoughts go, I can't *think* I have wronged him. But from habit, from the way one's been brought up, from the way even conventional opinion has somehow got into one's blood, I *feel* that I have wronged him, though I dare say the feeling is irrational; and I want to cauterize this feeling by suffering for him—by wearing myself out for him."

"Irma," he said, "whatever my thoughts may be, I too at times have a feeling resembling yours. Till now I have been shy of telling you of it; but I can never again have a secret

from you. Little Irma, I understand you entirely. But come, whatever we feel, our business is to be practical. Let us just consider first what it is possible to do about the children. The most obvious course would, I think, be to send them to the Princess."

"No," she said, "no. They are never well at the castle. They were poorly when last they went there."

"Well," he said, "then let the Princess take them somewhere. I have it. I happened to hear at the Pasha's that the Count's hotel in the forest is now formally opened, and that he has secured an excellent doctor, who is to live there during the season. One would not wish to bring a chance of infection to the hotel, but I could get Count T—— to put the lodge at your disposal. You could send the children with the Princess, or, if you liked, you could take them yourself there; and whether you would stay there or come back to your husband, you would be able to settle afterwards."

A nurse here entered, asking Mrs. Schilizzi if there were any further questions which she wished to ask the doctor. "I wish to ask him one," Grenville answered quickly; and, springing up, he hastened out into the passage. He came back in a minute or two. "I am glad," he said, "that I spoke to him, for he told me something, which to you he could not have put so strongly. He has seen Mr. Schilizzi again, and he feels particularly anxious that you should leave him for the next twelve hours to the care of the two nurses. If you are there—as you have told me—from time to time he excites himself. Nothing is so bad for him as this, and therefore, for his sake, just at this juncture it will be kindest not to go to him. Will you promise me not to do so?"

She looked at him doubtfully, as if she thought he was trying to deceive her. "He's not worse, is he?"

"No," said Grenville, "no. You may keep away from him with a perfectly clear conscience."

"Well," she said, "if it's for his good, I will."

"That's right," exclaimed Grenville with an accent of great relief. "And now about the children; what I propose to do is this. If you approve I will at once go to Count T—— (he's at home, I happen to know) and will ask him about the lodge. Then by the evening train I will go on to the Princess. I shall reach the castle before she has gone to bed, and I will be back here in the early morning, having arranged everything."

"Will you really," she said, "do all this for me?"

Her wondering incredulity, which melted as she spoke into gratitude, profoundly touched him. "Do me one little kindness," he said. "Lend me the doctor's book—I should like to look at it during my journey."

She gave it him and he was gone. He found the Count at home, who received him with the greatest courtesy, and at once placed the lodge at the disposal of himself or of his friends. He then hurried on to the train, which was to take him to the Princess. On the way he studied the book. He fancied that with more or less accuracy he could make out the general course which this disease, varying so in various cases, was taking with Paul Schilizzi. Whatever the mother had done and suffered for her children would not have surprised Grenville, though it might have moved him afresh to some new act of reverence for the beauty of her passionate maternity; but with regard to her husband, towards whom, as he knew well, patience was the highest feeling, and indifference the kindest, which his conduct and character made it possible for her to entertain or cultivate—with regard to her husband the case was quite different. That she should see him properly cared for and supplied with the best attendance, that whatever he wished her to do she should do and do willingly, this was natural enough. But what she had been doing, still more what she wished to do, went far beyond this. So far as his wishes went, his illness made few claims upon her. To him a nurse's care would have been just as welcome as hers; and the only thanks she received were either neglect or anger. And yet, in spite of this, she longed to do for him whatever was hardest—whatever to herself was naturally most repugnant; and what it was to which she was thus devoting herself, Grenville realized now, for the first time, as he read the account of the disease, and the attentions which were required by the patient. She had mentioned to him lightly that the symptoms were not agreeable. He now saw, from something else which had been told him by the doctor, and which fixed his attention on certain special paragraphs, that "these not agreeable symptoms" really comprised everything which could try and nauseate constitutions far stronger than hers. The infected air alone would for her be physical martyrdom; and there was nothing to sustain her, not even the sense that she was wanted—nothing but the passionate wish to be true to

an ideal of duty. And for the sake of this she had not only watched and suffered, but had done so, despite all provocation, with a tender and unfailing patience. These thoughts possessed him during the whole journey. "*Quia multum amavit!*" he several times exclaimed to himself; and once he said, "Let me only be worthy of her, let her only love me, till I die—and I shall not be afraid of death."

The Princess had been forewarned by telegraph, both of his coming and of the cause of it. The children were her idols. She was awaiting Grenville impatiently. He told her of the scheme he had proposed for sending them to the Count's hunting-lodge, together with all details as to the neighbouring doctor. She approved highly, praising his readiness of resource; and when he asked her if she herself were coming, she answered petulantly—

"Of course I am," as if she resented its being doubted. "My maid will see about packing my things to-night; and if the children can be moved to-morrow, I shall be ready to go with them. But the lodge—will that be ready?"

"Yes, it will," said Grenville. "There is a train which passes your station at three o'clock in the morning. I return by that. I shall reach Lichtenbourg by seven. I will ride over to the lodge. I can get there by half-past ten; and I'll engage that by to-morrow afternoon the whole place is fit for you."

"My poor friend," said the Princess with motherly pity, "you're almost dropping with sleep. You look yourself as if you'd been ill enough for all three of them." Grenville laughed and roused himself, for he was indeed nearly exhausted. "I tell you," said the Princess, "who causes me most anxiety. That's Irma herself. Of course in remaining with her husband she incurs the very gravest danger; and from what you tell me, her husband does not require her."

"I can't be sure," said Grenville, "how far she realizes the risk; indeed I myself till this afternoon knew very little about it; but I made her promise me that, at all events till I returned, she would stick to her children, and leave him to the doctor and the nurse."

"I," said the Princess, "will write her a note for you to give her. Any scrap of paper will do. I have one here. Will you lend me a pencil? Read it," she went on when she had finished.

"I shall be with you," the note ran, "by the middle of the day to-morrow. You know I'm an expert nurse; and you know also that I'm a very determined old woman; so I may as well tell you exactly what I mean to do. I am coming myself to take charge of your husband, and leave you free to do what is your only and obvious duty, and that is to be off at once with the children. For their sakes you have no business to run the smallest risk of becoming ill yourself, and consequently unable to look after them. Every time you go into Paul's room—at all events after you get this letter—I shall consider that you are doing by them a cruel and unjustifiable act. I must speak strongly, because what I know I have to overcome in you is a temptation supplied by your goodness; but you must please resist it. If you don't, you will show yourself unpardonably selfish. There—I have done. Take that for a parting dig, which your old aunt gives you too soon, that she may not have to give it to you too late."

"Will that do?" said the Princess, screwing her eyes up, and a little pleased, through her anxiety, with the kind causticity of the ending.

Grenville said it was excellent.

"By the way," said the Princess, "you too had better be careful. Nothing makes a person so liable to take the infection as this exhaustion from which you are now suffering."

She looked at her watch, and advised him to take some rest on a sofa in an ante-room near the door, and gave orders that the porter should sit up to awake him.

When he found himself again in the train day was already breaking, and the damp grey morning was scented with leaves and grass. He told the guard to wake him at the proper place, and, lulled by the freshness of the air, lost his trouble in sleep. A carriage was awaiting him at his station. He slept again during the drive; and it was not yet seven by the time he was back at the hotel. Maids and waiters were scrubbing the floors and door-steps; last night's tobacco-smoke was floating about the premises, and a smell of soap was mixed with it. To his great relief Fritz appeared in a moment, whom he begged to go instantly to Mrs. Schilizzi's maid, and inquire if her mistress were up, or if, at any rate, she were awake. An instant message was returned to him, asking him to go into her salon. He had not to wait long

before the door of her bedroom opened; and with grave, floating eyes, and a diaphanous flush in her cheeks, which a rose-coloured dressing-gown turned to a spectral pallor, she softly came towards him.

"I have," he said, "settled everything." He spoke eagerly, and, as he hoped, reassuringly. "The lodge is at your disposal for the children, and your aunt will be here by mid-day. She sees how to settle everything. Here is a letter she has written you. All is explained in that."

She read it through. As she did so her colour deepened. She sank on the sofa.

"Sit down here," she said to him. "I have something to tell you. I wonder what you will say to me." As she spoke she was close to him, but suddenly starting back, "What am I doing?" she exclaimed. "I may give you this horrible illness."

"Nonsense," he said, suddenly drawing on his invention. "The infection can only be taken from a person in whom the illness is developed."

She moved again towards him and took his hand.

"Listen!" she gasped. "Do you know what it is I've done? I've broken my word to you, and I've been again with Paul. He didn't know I was there, so I didn't excite or irritate him. His bed has curtains. I sat in a chair behind them. It was at night, and the room was dark, and I let the nurse sleep for an hour or two; and without his recognizing me, I did whatever there was to do. In some ways it's dreadful; only in seeing another suffering so, one forgets what one feels oneself. I suppose, however, one's body doesn't; for after two hours I fainted, and I was carried back to my room. But I couldn't keep away; and oh, Bobby, I can't now."

"Irma," he said, "were you only concerned, I would not try to dissuade you. But you know that I plead not for yourself, but for your children. I understand the reasons which commend to your own mind the other duty in preference to this. To do that duty seems to you a form of self-sacrifice. It is a form of self-sacrifice also to give it up. You will do most good to yourself by choosing what does most good to others."

"To be with the children," she said, "that in itself is heaven; and it seems to me now like running away from

pain ; and yet, when you speak of them, you disarm me. I have not the resolution to leave them ; though—don't you think this ?—for a week or so they could do without me."

" You quite forget one thing," he urged. " You might by remaining here make yourself unable to go to them for many a week, or, Irma, perhaps for ever. Have you any right to run that risk ? Have you the heart to do it ? You wouldn't run the risk of leaving them alone in the street. Can you bear the thought of leaving them alone in the world ? As for your husband, you may safely commit him to the Princess ; and I will remain here also, to do whatever I can do."

" I yield," she said. " I see that you must be right. To be away from that sick-room costs me far more than to remain in it. Go, dear friend, and arrange things as you please for me."

A horse was ordered for Grenville, whilst he ate a hasty breakfast ; and soon once more he was at the familiar hunting-lodge, making all necessary arrangements for Mrs. Schilizzi's arrival. Nothing escaped his forethought. Various provisions he ordered over from the hotel, and some articles of furniture which the manager kindly lent him. He had also a long interview with the doctor. Returning to Lichtenbourg, he found that the Princess had arrived, who was delighted—so far as the circumstances permitted of such an emotion—at finding her advice had been taken, not dreaming that it had needed seconding. Carriages were ordered by the ever-useful Fritz ; and almost before Mrs. Schilizzi knew what had been done, her boxes had been packed and sent on with a couple of servants ; whilst a capacious landau, specially constructed for invalids, was waiting at the door in the warm afternoon sunshine, ready for herself, a nurse, and the two children. The briskness of the Princess's manner was of great service on the occasion. She told her niece she was " silly and wrong and selfish " for having any reluctance to do what so clearly was pointed out to her, not only by duty, but by ordinary common-sense ; and with a semblance of anger, which acted like a moral tonic, and was sweetened at the same time by an under-current of deep kindness, she almost drove the little party out of the house into the carriage, where she carefully packed the children, kissing them whilst she did so. As they all drove off she stood waving her wrinkled hand at them, and forcing a cheerful smile, till a turn in the road hid them ; and

then her wrinkled hand found sudden occupation with her eyes.

"Schilizzi," she said to Grenville, as they turned indoors together, "is going on much the same. I have not yet seen him. I refrained from doing so till my niece was out of the way. I give you fair warning that in another hour I may be infectious; and so if you are wise you will avoid me as a dangerous character."

"My dear Princess," said Grenville, "I am not going to leave Lichtenbourg till you and all belonging to you are completely free from your anxieties. I only wish I could help you more than I can."

CHAPTER XXXI.

CERTAINLY at that moment he was incapable of doing anything. He had had no sleep, except in unrefreshing snatches, since he left the Pasha's castle; and now that the chief object of his exertions was secured, physical weariness, long held at bay, asserted its rights at last, and he slept soundly till the evening. His first care on waking was to ascertain where the Princess would dine, in order that he might keep her company, and not seem to desert her. He was told that she would dine in her sitting-room, where he was at liberty to dine also, and she would be glad of his company, though she advised him not to give it her. They met. The Princess retained her spirits wonderfully. She said that the invalid had every comfort possible, and that the badness of his temper gave her great confidence in his strength. She then turned the conversation to general matters, and sat down opposite to him, slightly smelling of disinfectants. The moment the meal was over she left him to his own devices, and he wandered out into the gardens restless and discontented.

With the departure of Mrs. Schilizzi, the whole place had become different. The band was sending music into the air, lamps were glittering, windows were shining through the

leaves. Love-making and coffee-drinking were in progress at the scattered tables. But for him there was vacancy everywhere; everything had lost its interest. Nor was this the case with regard to the place only. He felt it to be the case also with the state of his own mind. His sublime ideas of the duty of pain relaxed themselves; and resolutions that had soared high in the morning, now came fluttering down with nerveless wing.

He sat down at a table, and ordered some coffee and a liqueur. As he was lighting a cigarette, he caught sight of the doctor moving across the gravel towards the hotel entrance. He called him. The doctor seemed glad of a little society, and seating himself at the table called for some coffee also. Grenville asked after the invalid. "I shall see him again," the doctor said, "in an hour or so; and if you could come to the reading-room, I would meet you there and report to you. Ah!" he went on, "I am almost worn out by this time. It is reviving to sit here like this, and inhale the good clean air."

Grenville now talked to him about various indifferent subjects, and then ventured to say to him, "And how are you getting on yourself?"

"If," said the doctor, "I had only myself to think of, I should be getting on well—quite well; and even if I were not—what matter? I could bear it. But I have to think of others; and suppose I were to die now, my wife and my little children would be left in the world destitute."

Grenville tried to encourage him, and asked him about his practice. "Affections of the throat," he said, "I believe are your special study?"

"Yes," said the doctor, "I have studied them in Paris and in London both; but here Herr Schilizzi's has been my first serious case." And so the conversation came back to the point from which it had started.

"I was reading," said Grenville, "the book which you lent his wife. There is a mention in it of your improved tracheotomy tube."

"Mein Gott!" murmured the doctor, as if talking to himself, "supposing an operation in Herr Schilizzi's case should be necessary, nobody without such a tube could perform it on a man like him. You never knew him, Herr Grenville, before you met him in the train, did you?"

"Never," said Grenville, drily. "His wife's family are my friends; and I only found out who he was by seeing his photograph afterwards."

"Bah!" murmured the doctor, "it is a bad, sad business!"

Grenville looked at him inquiringly.

"Herr Grenville," he continued, dropping his voice somewhat, "Frau Schilizzi is a noble lady—she is an angel. He—you must know it as well as I do—is not fit to be her husband. I shocked you in the train—do you remember?—by my views about marriage. Herr Schilizzi is not fit, and never will be, to be the husband of anybody. Your English law, regarding him in that capacity, would pronounce his very existence to be a cruelty. I violate in telling you this no professional confidence. Herr Schilizzi does not realize the full gravity of his situation; but the fact which I tell you he makes no secret of. He was proclaiming it openly to two friends in my hearing. Bah! It's a bad business. I have forgotten my own troubles in thinking about it."

The doctor went, having some other patients to visit. Grenville rose also, and presently moved away to a remote quarter of the gardens, losing himself in shadow and solitude.

Whether the devil is a real person or no, it is easy to see how, without any external evidence, a belief in his reality may have arisen; for there are certain trials or adventures in the history of most minds which, though no doubt they may be accounted for in a more scientific way, are hardly capable of being described vividly, except by representing some alien spirit as an actor in them.

Through such a crisis Grenville was now passing; and it cannot be described except in the way just indicated. The devil spoke to him in a tone of insidious languor, which seemed to be common-sense taking rest after exercise, telling him that now he might leave events to themselves; arguing that he had already done far more than was needed of him; and that to hang about the sick man's room, and live habitually with his nurse, was a mere Quixotic madness, endangering himself and benefiting no one else. "You had much better," the devil said, "remain quiet and not trouble yourself. The sick man is almost certain to die. At any rate you cannot save him. When he dies you will have nothing with which to reproach yourself. You will not have to think that you have caused him a moment's pain; and then your life will be plain

for you, and Irma will be yours for ever. Ah, my friend, I can see," the voice continued, "that you still are moved by the example of an emotional woman; and you still fancy that by emulating this example you will be achieving some higher and closer union with her. You say you will be worthier of her. My friend, you will be simply a fool. The best service you can render her is to keep yourself in good health, so that whatever happens you may be able to cheer and protect her." The thrust of each fresh suggestion Grenville resisted passively; but he felt that they weakened, even if they did not wound him. Then at last the devil, with the adroitness of a conjuror, seemed to slip into his very self, speaking with his own voice, and attempting to drive him from his duty by a quite new series of arguments. The devil told him that he was a self-deceiving dreamer—that all his passion was nothing but a wicked weakness, that all the duties which seemed to arise from it were fantastic, and that if he were a man he would once for all break free from it, and lay his heart open to some other and healthier love. Then the devil, with a low whispering laugh, noiselessly left him, not dissatisfied with his work.

There are probably moments in the lives of the best of men when every efficient force in them is corrupted, except the will. Grenville's will in this case had not been conquered; but as he wandered on listlessly, he felt that it was weak and faint. Still it had force sufficient, after no very long interval, to turn him back to the hotel, and prompt him to inquire for the doctor. Before he could see him he had a considerable time to wait. He was hardly conscious what he should say to him when he did so; and, going into the reading-room, he began to study the papers. At last the doctor came. Grenville, on beginning to talk, heard his own voice like that of another person. He had a sense of curiosity as to what he should say next. He learnt, in answer to his inquiries, that Mr. Schilizzi was worse. Then he said, "Is there no way in which I can help? Can I be of any help to the Princess, and take anything off her hands?"

"No," said the doctor, "I honestly don't think so, unless you will go to a house about half a mile distant; and see if it is possible to engage another nurse. I am sorry to tell you that, in coming up the stairs in the dark, the Princess has sprained her ankle, and it has been necessary to put her to bed."

Grenville suddenly laid his hand on the doctor's arm. "Is a man," he said, "no use? Can I not act as a nurse? The Princess is my oldest friend. I am nearly connected with the family. If you can, for God's sake make use of *me*."

The doctor looked at him. "Are you at all aware," he said, "of the duties you would have to perform, or the conditions you would have to perform them in? I doubt if physically you could endure it. Have you had any experience of illness?"

"Listen," said Grenville; "I'll tell you what the conditions are—I'll tell you what I should have to do." And he rapidly ran through the various details with which the book he had studied had now made him familiar. "As for my nerves," he said, "don't trouble yourself about them. When a man is as anxious as I am, he's no time to be sick."

The doctor considered for a moment. "Well," he said, "till a second nurse could be got, your help would, no doubt, be valuable. You could at least relieve for an hour or two the woman who is with him now. She'll tell you what to do, and she can then get some sleep in a chair. But stay—the patient is often extremely irritable, and a face that he knows—one can't tell why—might excite him."

"Listen," said Grenville, "I know what I will do. I happen to have with me a false beard and whiskers, which were got for me under very different circumstances. They will quite disguise me, and I can pass myself off as your assistant."

"Well," said the doctor, "in that case talk German. He understands it perfectly, and he will never detect your accent."

The disguise was not one that required long for adjustment, and Grenville presently, under the doctor's guidance, was crossing the garden to the annexe where the sick man lay. His will by this time was vigorous and wide awake; and though his imagination menaced him with disgust, and though every nerve was shrinking, his resolution never wavered.

When, however, he entered the bedroom, the doctor, who watched his face, saw an involuntary change in it; and snatching up a bottle of salts made him smell them, whispering,

"You won't be able to stand it."

"Nonsense," said Grenville, with an effort. "I'm perfectly right already. Tell the nurse who I am, and let me be shown my duties."

They were not difficult, though not a few of them were repulsive; and made doubly repulsive from the inherent character of their object. But he felt himself urged onwards by a species of spiritual lever, working on some undefined fulcrum; and the more physical disgust pressed against one extremity, he was impelled in a direction precisely opposite by the other. Sharply awake as he was to the various offices required of him, of the rest of his physical circumstances he became but half conscious. The dim light falling across the bedclothes; the collection of bottles, glasses, handkerchiefs, and basins by the bedside, and the discoloured face of the sufferer, on which suffering had but emphasized a leer, together with the oppression of the atmospheric conditions—all this became for him like some frightful dream, merely oppressing his senses, but leaving his mind untouched. As the hours wore on, he felt that he hardly knew himself. An instinctive and tender adroitness was actuating his arms and hands; his eyes and ears were unremittingly watchful; he shrank from no office, no matter how disgusting. Who the sufferer was, or how the sufferer was connected with him, almost escaped his mind. He saw merely a man who, antipathetic to him in health, was even more antipathetic now—who did not touch him with any sense of compunction, or, except as a human being, with any sense of compassion. And yet over this man no mother could have watched more carefully, as he listened to his breathing, which seemed gradually growing more difficult, and raising him with an arm when a sudden spasm woke him.

It was long past midnight, when the door softly opened, and the doctor again appeared. Grenville was watching. The nurse was still sleeping.

"Not another nurse to be had," the doctor said in a whisper. "If he ever thanks anybody, he ought to thank you."

Struggling with a fit of suffocation the sufferer started up in his bed. Instinctively in an instant Grenville's arm was supporting him.

"Let me," said the doctor, "take your place for a moment."

He sat close by the bedside, and made his various observations. He put some medicine to Mr. Schilizzi's lips, and applied some ice to his throat. Then drawing Grenville aside, he shook his head.

"It's a grave case," he whispered. "It takes its course slowly; but the false membrane continues to increase in the throat. Stay—let us wake the nurse. You have relieved her long enough; and I will finish what I have to tell you outside."

He touched the sleeping woman, who opened her eyes instantly, and resumed with a mechanical readiness her former station by the bed. He gave her a few instructions, then went out with Grenville.

"I am aware, Herr Grenville," he said, "that I may speak to you quite freely. In fact you can hardly have mistaken my meaning, when I said to you not long since, that Herr Schilizzi was not in good health when this disease attacked him. Did I tell you that in the hearing of others, as well as of myself, he voluntarily admitted the fact, making a joke of it as he did so? He'll find that it's no joke now. His body is at this moment a mass of complicated corruption. He may pull through this attack. I shall judge better to-morrow; but I think it probable that within a very short time from now we may be driven to an operation on the trachea. If that is so, it will give us one hope more, and our only hope, though one which is too frequently disappointed."

They were by this time in the garden; and touching Grenville's arm, the doctor said kindly, "And now let me prescribe for you. Go to bed at once. It's a prescription which I shall follow myself."

For a time, however, tired as he was, Grenville had no wish to do so. One delight in the middle of trouble was overwhelming him: and this was the delight of tasting the pure night air. There was dew on the trees and on the beds of sleeping flowers. He approached his face to a rose-bush, and the drops of the night baptized him. He was conscious of a scent of jasmine. Suddenly exhilarated, he walked away rapidly to the remoter parts of the garden. There was more light than the stars, though the sky was full of them, would account for. He thought there must be a moon somewhere; but having looked for its disc in vain, he recognized the pallor of the morning stealing up already over the heights of the stirred foliage.

Thanks to the faithful Fritz, who had slept in the hall to wait for him, he easily gained his room, where his rest was profound and dreamless.

His first care next morning was to inquire about the con-

dition of the Princess. He learnt that she could not move, but would shortly be carried to her sofa. He sent word to her that he would come to her as soon as she could receive him, and bring the doctor with him, who would tell her all the news. He wrote at the same time a note to the doctor himself, so as to decide, before making the visit, how the news might be most judiciously told.

"I find," said the doctor, who came to Grenville's bedroom, "that the patient is going on precisely as I predicted; and in the course of to-day I think it is quite possible that nothing will be left for us but the operation of which I spoke to you. Everything will be in readiness; and it happens that only last week I had my apparatus for removing the particles of false membrane sent me back from Vienna, with a slight but important improvement."

"Has not something of the same kind," said Grenville, "been done by the mouth of the operator?"

"Under certain circumstances," replied the doctor, "yes. But the risk is always great, and is one which no doctor, in my judgment, could ever be called upon to run. But in this case it would be simple madness. The operator who ran it might as prudently swallow poison. His danger would be infinitely greater than that of which he relieved the patient."

"Well," said Grenville, "we need not sicken ourselves with discussing the question. Let us go to the Princess; and this is what I wish you to tell her—that Mr. Schilizzi, though dangerously ill, has developed no unexpected symptoms. The disease is running its course, say—anything to keep her quiet. And above all, tell her—not that she is not wanted, but that all her own instructions are being carried out to the letter."

The doctor was an excellent diplomatist; he even bettered the suggestions made to him; and the Princess, though she looked worn, smiled when he had finished his communication.

"And now," said Grenville, appealing to her, "do you think you could do this—write a note to your niece, which I will send by my servant, begging her not to worry herself, and enclosing a note from our friend here—I am sure he will kindly write it—saying again what he has just said to you, and telling her that even were she here, there would be nothing whatever for her to do?"

The two notes were written, and Grenville added one of his own.

"And now," said the doctor, as soon as they had left the sitting-room, "I'm sure, Herr Grenville, you had better to-day take a drive or ride into the country. Later in the day, no doubt I shall be glad to see you again, but if you wish to take care of others you must first take care of yourself."

Many people who are subject to sea-sickness feel the touches of the malady before they have set foot on their vessel. The thought of the sick-room, and all its unwonted incidents, affected Grenville now in a very similar way. He was brave enough in enduring it for the first time, because past experience had supplied him with no terrors of anticipation; but now the case was different. Still, without knowing why, he stood his ground, and declared that at all events, before walking or riding, he would, in his former disguise, personate the doctor's assistant, and visit the patient in his company.

"Stop!" he exclaimed. "Is not that your servant looking for you?"

"It is," said the doctor. "I see by his face he wants me. Come, Herr Grenville, if you mean to come you must be quick about it."

At the top of the stairs, outside Mr. Schilizzi's bedroom door, was a man who said in a whisper, "I have here the case of instruments. You have the key yourself. It seems to me they will be needed."

Through the thin door came the sound of a violent paroxysm of coughing, followed by a straining for breath, that was like a prolonged groan; and a moment or two later the sufferer had sunk back exhausted, and, as Grenville thought, dead. The doctor, however, knew otherwise.

"Herr Grenville," he said, moving presently from the bed, "I am glad that you insisted on coming with me. It relieves me of a certain responsibility. The disease has surprised me by the exceptional rapidity of its development. I wished, as I explained to the Princess, to have had a consultation this morning, but for that now there is absolutely no time. If I do not act instantly, Herr Schilizzi may be dead in half an hour. His only chance lies in my operating at this moment. You can be of no assistance; you will be only trying your nerves. You will therefore forgive me if I recommend you to leave the room."

Very slowly Grenville was preparing to do so, when a low exclamation from the doctor's assistant startled him. The

box had been opened, and though the requisite tube was there, the suction apparatus of which the doctor had spoken was missing.

"Mein Gott!" the assistant exclaimed. "It was taken out in order to have one of the screws adjusted. I will hasten and fetch it instantly."

"Instantly!" repeated the doctor. "Twenty minutes at the shortest. Listen—he is choking again. He'll be dead by the time you're back."

Before more could be said, Grenville unexpectedly interfered. Seizing the attendant by the arm, "Go to the patient," he said, and then addressed himself to the doctor: "Don't discompose yourself. The apparatus shall be my mouth. Not a word—I insist. I know precisely what I am doing. Have no scruple in using me. You have a family dependent on you; no one depends on me. Quick—quick!—out with your tools, and begin about it."

"I tell you," said the doctor, "you might just as well drink poison. At best the chance of saving the patient is small; but it is large as compared with the chance against your saving yourself. Besides, it is an operation of considerable delicacy and difficulty."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Grenville. "I order you to let me have my way. Delicacy!—difficulty! By God! man, do you take me for an idiot? I can spit through a tube—I can blow peas through a tube. Do you mean to tell me that sucking is less easy than spitting?"

"You," said the doctor, overcome by his determination, "are able to answer for yourself; that man on the bed is not. I should not be justified in refusing this last chance you offer him; though, bear me witness, I declare you are not justified in offering it. The consequences will be on your own head."

"God be my judge," Grenville murmured inaudibly. "And yet what do I mean by that? If I owe a debt to any invisible creditor, he will understand. I offer him all I have." Whilst these reflections were rapidly passing through his mind, the horror of the duty which he was about to perform for a moment overcame his nerves. There was a sudden spasm of his muscles; he barely avoided vomiting. Meanwhile the room was full of subdued sounds. A moment more, and he was conscious of a metal something in his mouth. The assistant presently was exclaiming, "See, he

is breathing freely!" and the doctor was pressing a glass to Grenville's lips, saying, "Take this—take it, and wash your mouth out thoroughly."

Grenville was docile. He did exactly as he was bidden; but before he retired, as he did almost directly, "Promise me," he said to the doctor, "to say nothing to the Princess of what I did, nor write anything about it to Mrs. Schilizzi either; at all events, not till we see that I am none the worse for it. I am not anxious myself, but it might add to their anxieties if they knew. You're a good fellow, so promise me to be faithful in this." The doctor promised. "And now," Grenville continued, "as soon as I have changed my clothes, and done all the little things that you advise, I shall tell the Princess that the patient is much easier, and ride over to the hunting-lodge, and give the same news to his wife."

"You couldn't do better," said the doctor. "Tell your news while it is true."

The second relief from the tainted atmosphere, the conviction, which he could not distrust, that he had himself done his utmost, the hurry of his toilet, and the bracing luxury of his bath, the bearing of his news to the Princess, and his preparation for his ride, left him at first little time for thought; and he was hardly calm enough for anything that could be called reflection, till he found himself alone, rapidly riding through the forest, with the smell of the pines blowing softly against his nostrils, and the rapid motion filling him with the joy of living. And now at last the question began assailing him—"Am I, as I ride, carrying with me the seeds of death? Is not this my last week of the air, the forests, and the sunshine? And will not my world be soon a sick-room like the one I have just left?" Sunshine and shadow lay upon the road interlacing; brooks which he passed were laughing and leaping like playing children, and the air moved everywhere as if it were a vagrant joy. He took it into his lungs, feeling that he was inhaling nature, and then, as he did so, asked himself, "Is it not for the last time?"

It was a question which he could not answer, and which indeed he could only half realize; so before long he managed to elbow it aside, or rather, against his will it was elbowed aside by another—a question relating to the probability not of his own death, but that of Mr. Schilizzi. This had occurred

to him again and again before, but he had resolutely refused to dwell on it, or the prospects which lay beyond it; and absorbed as he had been in practical and painful effort, he had repelled it easily.

But now it presented itself to him more importunately and vividly; and he felt he had earned a right to speculate on the consequences of a death, which he had risked, and perhaps forfeited, his own life to avert. This mood, however, did but last for a moment or two. He had hardly yielded to it before it shocked and disgusted him; and he presently exorcised it by sending his thoughts forward to the relief, if not to the pleasure, which he would be bringing to Mrs. Schilizzi by news pointing to the recovery, not the death, of her husband. He soon forgot everything else in this. The pleasure to himself even of being once more in her presence, and of reading the secret in her eyes, which swam in them through all her trouble, was a prospect which gave place in his mind to the pleasure of seeing the relief which, unconnected with himself, would come to her from the news he brought her.

As he approached the lodge, the first thing that caught his eye was her red dress and her parasol, motionless by the border of the lake. At the sound of hoofs she suddenly turned round, staring at him, as if doubtful as to who he was or what was his errand. As he drew near, however, and as she recognized his face and his expression, she eagerly came forward with a smile of hope and of inquiry.

"I have come," he said, "to relieve you of the anxiety which I know must have been wearing you out here. You got the note which I sent over this morning?"

"Yes," she said. "How good of you! It arrived two hours ago."

"Well," he continued, "I have a later bulletin for you. He was far easier when I left him than he has been for the last twelve hours. You need not fret yourself because of your being here. There is nothing you could do for him that is not done by his attendants; and your presence might excite him, whilst with them he is quite quiet."

"And has he," she said, "not asked for me?"

"He has asked for no one," said Grenville. "He has not mentioned your name."

He wondered as he told her this whether she would be hurt

by hearing it. A sound came from her that seemed to be a sigh of relief; and yet a faint meaning of sadness was given to it, when she said—

"Of course he didn't know how I sat up half the night with him, and how, had nothing prevented me, I would be at his bedside still." Then her face brightened and softened into a smile, as, laying her hand on his arm, she said, "Come in and see the children. Have your horse put up, and I'll tell them to make some coffee for you."

She went with him to the stables; but on turning back to the lodge—

"I think," he said to her, "I had better not see the children. I have been in his room; and though I have changed my clothes, one never knows if there may not be some chance of infection. I hardly know, indeed, if I ought to remain with you."

"Bobby," she exclaimed, "don't go, I implore you. You won't hurt me; and even suppose you would—if I had to consider no one except myself, I would say to you now, give me death with your lips. Bobby, do you think that I am very wicked and inconsistent? And you went to see him, did you? And you sat by his bedside? Darling, wait a little with me. We won't go in to the children. We will have our coffee outside, under the beech-tree, as we have done before. Do you remember? Do you remember our old times here?"

When he said good-bye he gently held her at a distance from him. He kissed her hand. Such was their sole endearment. In spite of this interview, however, or, to speak more truly, because of it, he rode back enveloped in a deepening gloom. He had just been seeing a vision of all that life held for him; what it might give him fully if Paul Schilizzi died; what it might give him partially if Paul Schilizzi lived; and the terrible thought settled down on him like a cloud, that at this moment he was probably a dying man himself; or that, worse still, if he was not doomed to death, his life would be blighted by some revolting and nameless taint—that perhaps even he might become an offence to look upon, and that at all events he would bear the burden of a hopeless and secret isolation.

But even now he was not conquered; nor, in spite of all these thoughts, was he dispossessed of the spirit which had brought him into his present straits. Once or twice mentally

he cursed Paul Schilizzi; but he sharply checked the temper which prompted the passing outburst, and never for a moment allowed himself to complete the wish that anything which he had done during the past day and night had been not done. He even prepared his mind, should he find this to be required of him, for another vigil at the suffocating and odious bedside.

With a view to giving himself no time for flinching, the moment he reached Lichtenbourg he sent to inquire of the doctor if he could be of any further assistance; and, whilst waiting for an answer, he hastened to the sitting-room of the Princess, in order to give her a good account of her niece. She received the news with a smile, but it struck him as a rather indifferent one; and setting it down to the pain of her sprained ankle, he asked her how it was, saying at the same time, "I suppose you have not been able to see Mr. Schilizzi?"

"You haven't heard, then!" she said, with a certain severity of accent. "And yet how should you? I suppose you have seen nobody. Paul Schilizzi died about an hour ago. There was another doctor present during the last moments; and it seems, at all events, that the best that could have been done was done. Had it not been for the operation performed on him, they tell me he must have died this morning. I'm sorry," she went on, as if anxious to relieve herself by finding fault with something, "I'm sorry that you should have troubled yourself to raise poor Irma's spirits, merely to make this heavy shock the heavier. Hark!" she said, "that is the doctor's voice in the passage."

"I sent to him to inquire," said Grenville. "I suppose he has come to ask for me."

His voice as he spoke had a curious tremor in it. The Princess looked sharply up at him. He was standing near the open window, and she saw that he was shivering as if with cold. "Don't," she said, "stand in the draught having made yourself hot with riding. Call in the doctor, and let us speak to him here."

The doctor entered, and answered Grenville's questions, giving him an assurance which he had already given the Princess, but which she, nevertheless, was pleased at hearing repeated, that Mr. Schilizzi at the end had had little conscious suffering, that he had expressed no wish to see any friends or

relations, that he had missed the presence and had noticed the absence of nobody.

"I hope," said Grenville, "that you will assure Mrs. Schilizzi of that. Her natural impulse will be to reproach herself bitterly for having left him."

"If she had not left him," said the doctor, "I promise you I will assure her of this—that she might easily have had one of her children leaving *her*. Herr Grenville, what's the matter with you? It seems that you have taken a chill."

"That's what I tell him," said the Princess. "Herr doctor, you must make him take care of himself. Send him off to his room, and give him a hot bath."

This, indeed, the doctor presently did, telling Grenville that, after the danger he had incurred, it was impossible to be too careful. "A common cold with you," he said, "might develop into something serious. As for this," he went on, anxious to be reassuring, "it is nothing; but don't neglect it. Dine in your own room. I'll send you a draught which will give you a sound sleep; and to-morrow morning we shall find that you're quite yourself again."

"One word," said Grenville. "As to Mrs. Schilizzi, she will have, of course, to be told. Will you go to the Princess and advise her as to writing a letter, and, if necessary, add a line of your own, emphasizing the points I mentioned?"

Grenville, for his own part, followed the doctor's advice, though, when the morning came, he hardly fulfilled his prophecy. He had, indeed, the comfort of a dreamless sleep, so escaped the ferment of thoughts consequent on the new situation; but as to his physical condition, though he no longer shivered, he felt languid and unwilling to rise, and he realized gradually that he had a certain soreness in his throat. He did his best to convince himself that this was only fancy; and, though it cost him an effort, he at last got up and dressed. He had just finished his toilet, when the doctor made his appearance, partly to bring some news to him, and partly to visit him professionally. Having questioned and examined him as to his symptoms: "Ah," he said, "I don't think this will be much. You need not alarm yourself, but you ought to be very careful. I should have preferred that you had stayed in bed to-day, and, indeed, I should advise that presently you went back to it again. But as you are up, you will be doing no great harm to yourself if you will come down with

me for a minute or two to the Princess. She wants to see you before Frau Schilizzi's arrival."

The Princess was better. With the aid of a stick she could walk a little, and she sat up instead of lying down on the sofa. The alertness, however, which was visible in her whole expression, Grenville saw at a glance was largely due to nervousness, and the questions she began to put to him showed him the same thing.

"I want you," she said, "to tell me once again exactly what you told Irma yesterday about her husband. It seems to me you must have spoken to her much too hopefully; and if you did the shock will be all the worse. When she comes I shall want both of you to be present—you, Herr doctor, especially—in order to assure her that she could have done no good by being here."

Grenville was proceeding to explain for a second time what it was he had said—and he felt himself, as he did so, that he had perhaps erred in the way the Princess declared he had. "But it was," he continued, "precisely because I knew how much her sensitive nature was suffering under her enforced absence, that I wished, since there was no question of bringing her back here, to relieve her from the tension of an anxiety that could do no good to any one."

The Princess had no time to reply to this; for he was still speaking when the door of the room opened, and Mrs. Schilizzi herself entered. Haste and some overwhelming emotion were visible in her eyes and cheeks, and in her lips, which were at first compressed, and then opened as if gasping.

"And is it true?" she said, as they all looked in silence at her. "Is there really no hope?"

"Doctor," said the Princess, "you explain it all to her."

The doctor, without mentioning the operation, quietly explained to her that the course the disease had taken, though not unusual, had been in this case unexpected, and again assured her that her presence would not only have been no help to her husband, but would have been unperceived by him. The words seemed, however, to make but little impression upon her.

"If," she said, speaking to the Princess, "I had only been with him when he died—if I were only at this moment tired and ill with having watched by him—it would be different.

But now—you have all of you kept me away. You have made me guilty of a desertion for which I can never forgive myself, and for which I can never atone." Her voice suggested pain rather than ordinary grief. There was silence for a moment, then the Princess prepared to speak; but before she had delivered herself of more than a premonitory cough, Mrs. Schilizzi sharply turned to Grenville, and, with a hardening voice, said to him, "And you—you completely took me in. You told me he was better. You told me not to be anxious. If it hadn't been for you, I might have reached him in time. He was dying when you came to me; and with a lie you kept me away from him."

"Perhaps," said Grenville to the doctor, speaking with obvious difficulty, "you had better explain all to her—nothing, you understand, that respects myself: I merely refer to Mr. Schilizzi's illness. I told her that when I left the condition of the patient was easier."

"Frau Schilizzi," said the doctor, turning to her with great gravity, "Herr Grenville told you nothing but the truth. He forbore, by my advice, to go into needless details; but if you wish it, I may as well explain them to you. Yesterday morning, your husband's condition became such, that the only hope left us was to perform an operation on his throat, commonly resorted to in such circumstances. But for this, he must have died five hours earlier. The operation was successful, and had his health been good otherwise——"

But Mrs. Schilizzi would not suffer him to continue. "An operation!" she exclaimed. "He had suffered an operation—and you, Mr. Grenville, told me nothing at all about it!" He was leaning against the wall. She rose up, and she went over to him. "Do you know," she exclaimed, "what you have done? You have taken my last chance from me. You have forced me to neglect him; you have allowed him to be neglected by others. You have killed him yourself, and the reproach of his death is mine. Speak to me, can't you! I advise you to do so now, for never again shall I give you an opportunity."

She seemed hardly to know what she was saying. One stinging sentence seemed to beget another. He looked at her fixedly with an expression of painful wonder. He tried to speak, but at first he had no voice; then a word or two came, hoarse and accompanied by a cough.

"Oh," she exclaimed ironically, "and so you have a cough now, have you! Much good that will do! You may at least muster voice to answer me."

Here, however, there was a movement made by the doctor. He had been watching Grenville intently, and listening to the sounds emitted by him; and now going up to him, and taking him forcibly by the arm, he led him out of the room with a promptitude that ensured compliance. "Go," he said, "and get back to bed directly. In a few minutes I will be with you. Your life may depend upon your prudence."

Almost stupefied by the scene he had just gone through, Grenville went to his room with a dull mechanical resignation, and the doctor returned to the other two before either of them had uttered another syllable. He shut the door with a bang. In his cheeks was a flush of anger. He strode up to Mrs. Schilizzi, and confronted her with a look that terrified her. "Madame," he said, "that gentleman who has just left us has indeed done what you taxed him with, and kept back from you—and begged me to do so also—the most remarkable incident connected with your husband's illness. Seeing, however, the manner in which you treat him, it will be best for you—it will be best for every one—that I tell you the whole truth. I cannot allow you to be ignorant of it. Herr Grenville, madame, whom you charge with having killed your husband, and to whom you say you will never again speak, when your aunt, the Princess, was disabled, and one of the nurses failed me, attended your husband himself during the most trying night of his illness, with a nerve and a care which few trained nurses could have equalled; and when, madame, that operation took place, which you blame him for having concealed from you, it was solely his heroism which enabled it to take place at all. With his own mouth," said the doctor, his voice rising, "he performed the desperate function of removing through the tracheotomy tube the membrane that was suffocating your husband. No man walking up to a cannon's mouth took his life in his hand more surely than did Herr Grenville then; he did it knowing that the danger was worse even than I dare explain to you; and events will have treated him with a favour which he had no right to reckon upon, if he is not now laying himself down in his bed to await the death from which he struggled to save your husband."

"Doctor," cried the Princess shrilly, "stop—I order you to

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stop. Look at my niece. Can't you see what you are doing to her?"

Mrs. Schilizzi's face had indeed undergone a change. Its expression had softened into one of helpless sorrow. Her eyes were wide and appealing, then they became vacant. "Don't let him die!" she gasped as her strength failed her; and the doctor in another moment had placed her, unconscious, on a sofa.

"You need not be alarmed," he said quietly, turning to the Princess. "She will come to herself presently."

The Princess showed by a look that she was sufficiently aware of this, and said with an anxious sharpness, "Is it really true that you are alarmed about Mr. Grenville?"

"He has," said the doctor, "taken a slight chill which, as I have seen during the last ten minutes, has already affected his throat; for seven days he will probably be a prisoner in his own room; but I hope, as we have certainly taken the disorder in time, that he may escape any serious consequences, though the escape will be very narrow, and is, I am bound to tell you, very far from certain. As for Frau Schilizzi, if you will permit me, I will summon her maid, and I will go myself to a patient who needs my attention more."

CHAPTER XXXII.

SOME ten days later, sitting up in his bed, and bearing traces at once of weakness and returning strength, Grenville was listening to the doctor's welcome announcement, that he might leave his room for an hour or two, and enjoy the luxury of a drive; whilst very soon, if he wished it, he could probably leave Lichtenbourg.

The doctor, whilst giving his patient this welcome news, found his eyes arrested by something that was lying on the table beside the bed. It was a roll of paper-money, tied with a coloured tape. The doctor started, remained for a moment motionless, and then turning nervously towards Grenville, tried to say something, but could not get out a word. Gren-

ville presently perceived the subject of the doctor's observation. A look of guilty embarrassment made its way into his face, and his pale cheeks became pink with a faint blush.

"Herr Grenville," exclaimed the doctor at last, "a light has suddenly broken on me. Forgive me—let me speak plainly. I recognize something on your table. I gave it to the manager of the hotel. He lent me some time since 2,400 florins, and has lately pressed for the repayment of them. But the day you were taken ill, he told me that if I paid a quarter, the rest, should it be more convenient to me, might be paid in a year's time. I gave him the quarter—and I see it lying there. Herr Grenville, it is you, and not he, that have done me all this kindness. You have saved me from ruin. Mein Gott—how shall I thank you!" And the doctor's big round eyes were like two saucers with slops in them.

Grenville's last effort before taking to his bed had been to beg the manager not to press the doctor, but to ask only for a quarter of the total owed—a sum which to Grenville at the moment was little short of necessary. "Give me the balance," he now said, "when it suits you. You needn't thank me except for a common piece of friendliness. Pay me five per cent. if you like, and my money will have been well invested." "Irma," he said to himself, when the doctor had gone, "Irma," he said, doing himself considerable injustice, "if it wasn't for you, should I ever be kind to any one?"

Then he turned to a little pile of letters, which were lying by the doctor's bundle. It was evident they had been read already. He began re-reading them.

The first consisted only of these few words. "Forgive me—forgive me. They will not let me come near you. They tell me you will soon be well. I wish I could kneel to you, and once more say, 'Forgive me.'—Irma."

The second, which was dated the following day, was longer. "Your servant gave me your message.. It was only 'Thank you. Write again.' I believe you meant to show me that you are at all events not implacable. I must have been mad—mad—when I spoke to you as I did. This morning Paul was buried. All the world seems suddenly so hushed and strange to me that, just as in a church one is afraid to speak or laugh, I am afraid to let myself think or feel. But at least

I may tell you I hope you are not suffering. I may comfort myself with the confidence—the doctor gives me this—that your recovery will be rapid; and—once more—oh, forgive me.”

Then came these, of which every day had brought one.

“The Princess goes home this afternoon. Her ankle is almost well. I too must leave. I am obliged to rejoin my little ones. Thank you for your few words, which I could see you wrote with difficulty, telling me that my letters soothed and did not disturb you. I shall drive over to-morrow, perhaps taking the children with me, to inquire after you. And now shall I tell you one thing? Dare I? Will you think ill of me for it, considering what took place yesterday? Will you think—? Oh, Bobby, I don’t know quite what I mean; but I will tell you what it was I did. Last night I was told you were sound asleep. My maid had just heard this from your servant, when I asked about you. She was in the passage outside your room. I asked her to look in. Yes—you were sleeping. I came in myself on tiptoe, just to have one look at you; and then I stooped down and gave you one kiss on the forehead. I saw my little scribbles lying on the table, amongst your medicine glasses. It made me cry to think that such little things could please you.”

“I am,” ran the next note, “writing this in your hotel. I have driven over, with my two children, to ask for you, as I said I would. Send me a line—a word or two; or else a mere message. I hear you are much better. Oh, if I could only see you! But it would not be allowed me; and under the circumstances I ought not to ask it. Oh, to be with you again, and to hear your lips say, and to see your eyes look, the forgiveness that you have written to me! When I see you again will you be quite the same? Are you sure you will? I shall not be. I shall be changed; but if you still can care about what happens to me, it is not a change that will displease you.”

Weak though he was, he had written her a short answer, as hers of the next day showed.

“You tell me,” she said, “that the doctor thinks you may move soon. But oh, what do you mean by this—? You write, ‘If I die, I leave my diary to you. It is full of you. It is full of nothing else. It is in a packet sealed up and directed to you.’ Why do you frighten me? And yet what

you say touches me so. I am sending you something. Open it. It is an acknowledgment. It will show you how completely I am in your hands. Oh, Bobby—you are getting better; I see it in your handwriting. Yes—you will move soon. Where will you go? You will think I am very selfish; for the first thought in my mind when I ask that question is whether you mean to go without seeing me or saying a word to me. Don't do that, Bobby. Tell me all your plans. Need you go far away? I hardly know what I write. This air agrees with the children wonderfully. They are getting quite strong again. The loss they have suffered made them curiously quiet at first; but the return of health makes a kind of spring in their minds, and they are beginning to play in the forest, as in the days which you remember. Send me a line—one line even is better than nothing; and tell me that you are getting stronger."

Along with this letter had come a packet, which was lying on the table, partly but not quite undone. It was her own diary. He saw it was that. He had reverently raised it to his lips, and laid it down unopened, like some sanctuary which he hesitated to profane.

Her next day's note, and the last of the collection, was this. Grenville had just received it, and it was dated the previous night. "Fritz arrived with yours, only an hour ago. Yes. Come here. How can I say no? I could not have ventured to make the suggestion myself, but I was hoping and dreaming that you might be moved to make it. Come to the hotel. I will order the best rooms for you. Would you like to have those that once upon a time were mine? Oh, Bobby, when I think of all that you have gone through, and when I now know that each day you are growing stronger, a duplicate of your health seems to be springing up in me; only, the name of the plant in my soil is not health but happiness. Any day now I will expect you; but if you can, give me a few hours' notice. I still am nervous and shaken; and even a pleasure that took me by surprise would be a shock to me."

As Grenville was finishing his reading, Fritz entered the room, with towels and hot water, and, opening the window a little, admitted a whisper of leaves, and a breath of sunny air scented with early summer. Grenville felt like a soul entering Paradise, as the freshness reached his nostrils; for what stole into his mind was not the summer only, but the prescience also

of an unbelievable something into which his own life was expanding. By midday he was breakfasting in the sitting-room lately vacated by the Princess. Then followed his drive. His last excursion in the environs of Lichtenbourg had been the walk he took on the morning when Mrs. Schilizzi had explained to him that she wished he would rid her of his company, and banish himself to the Pasha's castle. That morning he had hardly known where to wander, for every road held some happy memory of her which would then have taunted him in his misery. But now to these roads he was again licensed to return—the happy memories again were becoming part of his own life. His only difficulty now was, what road to choose. It was a choice between pleasures, and he lingered over it throughout his meal. When at last he found himself in the carriage, the whole world seemed bright with blossoms. High laburnums bosomed themselves on clouds of leafage. Thorn trees had broken out into masses of white and pink, and their faint but penetrating scent was straying in wayward courses; and his own memories were blossoming and floating everywhere, like the blossoms and like their scents.

The doctor that evening gave him the unexpected information that, if he chose to do so, if he would take proper precautions, and if he would not travel too far continuously, he might leave Lichtenbourg next day. "And where," he asked presently, "would you think of going?"

The question caused in Grenville a certain amount of embarrassment, but without any actual untruth, he managed to get out of it creditably. "The Princess," he said, "will have me whenever I wish to go to her; but, before doing that, I must see Mrs. Schilizzi; so I thought of going first for a day or two to the hotel in the forest."

The doctor declared that nothing could be better than this, as the air there was healthy and bracing to an extraordinary degree. "In fact," he said, "I should advise you to remain there till you are quite strong again."

"And now," said Grenville, "I must ask you an important question, and I trust you to answer candidly. Do you think that my health in any way has suffered, or is likely to suffer, from what I have gone through? I say *in any way*! and you will not misunderstand my meaning."

"Herr Grenville," said the doctor, "had your health been less sound than it was some ten days ago, my answer might

have been either a doubtful or a painful one. I cannot say that what you have suffered has left absolutely no effect on you ; but the effect, I can tell you confidently, will be no more than this : your throat may be more delicate than it was before—more liable to the attack, say, of some form or other of laryngitis. I must advise you then to take great, though not excessive, care of yourself, and not to neglect precautions at which otherwise you might have safely laughed."

The first thing next morning a messenger was sent to the hunting-lodge, with the announcement that Grenville would follow in the course of the afternoon. He did so ; but the carriage being heavy, the journey was slower than he had anticipated, and it was five o'clock before the manager of the hotel was showing him into the sitting-room, with which he was so vividly familiar. Lying on the table was a note. It said—

"I will wait in for you. Will you come over and see me? I wonder if you would be able to dine with us?"

He sat down, fatigued a little with the drive, and looked about him for a minute or two. Every vase or jar which would hold flowers was filled with them. Some were wild-flowers, but there were others—especially some roses ; and he divined that these must have come from a certain neighbouring garden, which he himself, wading amongst grey dew, had once rifled in the hush of a dim dawn.

He longed to hasten to the hunting-lodge. He longed to say that he would dine there. But not only prudence, but an actual sense of weakness, prompted him to write and despatch the following note instead :—

"I must not come this evening. I am not very strong yet. You must dine here, and must bring the children with you."

An answer was brought back to him on a folded scrap of paper.

"Yes," it said, "we will come."

An hour or so later, as he was still resting in his chair, he heard in the passage a pattering of light feet. There was a light knock at the door, and in came the two children. They came close to him, and gave him their faces to be kissed. He looked for their mother. They had left the door open. He knew she must be coming. She stood presently in the doorway. Above her soft black dress, her face once more to Grenville suggested the petal of a pale geranium. There was

in her attitude as she stood there a moment's gentle hesitation, and what her eyes suggested to him was the clear shining after rain. Their meeting was made easy by the children's presence. There was no passion perceptible in it—nothing but a gentle and profound quiet.

"Rest," she said, "rest. I am not going to have you standing. Go back to your chair, and I will bring mine beside you." Softly, tenderly, for a moment she laid her finger-tips on his forehead, and murmured, half smiling, two lines of Shelley's—

"My hand is on thy brow,
And my spirit on thy brain."

She asked him how he was. She told him about the health of the children. Then in a low tone she said a word or two about the funeral, and added,—

"I know now that I could really have been of no service. The doctor told me that I had nearly been very ill myself. That was the thing which really at last quieted me. It was a witness borne by my body that I really had done my best. I wouldn't believe my soul, though that said the same thing. I fancied it was deceiving me. I couldn't bring myself to believe it. Why should the witness of our body be so much the more convincing?"

In their voices, as they spoke together, there was no note of sorrow, but there was something subdued and hushed—a tribute of reverence to the solemnity of a recent human catastrophe. Then came dinner and the ripple of the children's talk, in which not even the knowledge of death could silence the laugh of childhood. Their mother and Grenville had to speak to them about their food. One child had an absurd struggle with a chicken-bone; the other, by and by, a miniature tragedy with her gravy; and the conversation, as it flitted from one such trifle to another, though still subdued, gradually became more natural. The two small mouths were busy and getting sugary with sweetmeats, when the nurse arrived to summon them back to bed.

"Let them," said Mrs. Schilizzi, "have a little run on the way, and I will watch them from the balcony. Go, children—go. Mother will come soon; and if you can, catch a fairy to show her. Only mind, it must be a good fairy."

She and Grenville went into the balcony, and watched the two small forms flitting about below them. Presently from a

clump of bog-myrtle rose a large pale-winged moth, to which the children instantly gave chase, jumping into the air, and reaching their hands towards it. As she watched this incident, Mrs. Schilizzi laughed. The sound was that unconscious ripple which Grenville knew so well. He turned to her. Her face was bright with a happy smile. It was a smile like the year's first snowdrop.

"Bobby," she said, "you mustn't stay out too long. You look so worn and tired. You had better come in now. Take my arm ; you are not too proud to lean on me."

She closed the window so as to keep the draught from him. She seated herself beside him on a sofa, and looked at him gravely and in silence. At last her form made a slight movement towards him. In an instant, gently and closely, like the tendrils of a noiseless plant, his arms were about her neck, and his lips were whispering in her ear, "Irma, from this day I will never, I will never leave you."

"Hush, oh, hush !" she exclaimed, softly disengaging herself. "I will never leave you either, if you will let me remain with you. But for a little while you must let me watch over you like a mother. You are very weak still, and I must treat you like my little child. You are not strong enough yet even to catch a fairy."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THEY had arranged before separating that, if the weather was warm enough, they would go next morning once again into the forest, and sit again at the foot of a certain beech-tree, whose smooth stem still shone in their memories. The morning brought with it all the warmth they could have wished for. The scented air touched them like tepid water ; and they drove with the children along the remembered track, above which the squirrels still leapt in the branches. They found the glade they sought ; they found the very beech-tree. They seated themselves under its shade, which now was a darker green.

They could hardly realize the peace of their present situation—a peace which trembled with happiness as a breeze-touched sea with sunlight; and it was almost a relief to them, as showing them that they were not dreaming, to find that, like a sun-lit sea, it had also a passing cloud or two.

“Irma,” he said, “we still have some difficult things to settle.”

“Tell me,” she murmured, “what things. I too know of many; but I want you to speak first.” Grenville hesitating, she presently went on. “After all, we have still something to settle with our consciences.”

“Have we?” he answered. “I think so sometimes, and sometimes I don’t think so. What I feel now is this—that if we owed our consciences anything—no matter how much—we have at least offered them the utmost payment we could make.”

“You,” she said, “have indeed done so. I too wanted to pay my debt as you did. Do you think that my mere wish was payment complete enough?”

“Don’t,” said Grenville, “let us trouble about this now. Fate, or the course of events, or what I should like to describe as God, has gently given us back what we both gave it to take. If to God, or to law, or to our own souls, there is still a payment due, since we could not make it with our deaths, let us think how we may make it with our lives. Do you know,” he went on, “it often seems to me that we may go just as far wrong, and show just as little moral courage, in accusing ourselves, as we do in excusing ourselves. Do you remember the verses I wrote?—I have often thought of them since—

‘And we will turn the dark to daylight by
That one sole lamp—our own fidelity.’

Don’t fret yourself, Irma. We will together learn what to think of things.”

She looked down on him softly. “I couldn’t fret now,” she said, “if I wished to.”

“When,” Grenville resumed, “I spoke about things to be settled, I was thinking not about all this. I was thinking not about our past, but about our immediate future.”

“Yes,” she said nervously. “What is it? Don’t say you’re going to leave me!”

“If I did,” he answered, “I should trust you not to believe

it. No—but before we are able, without offending the world, to establish a relationship between ourselves which the world can recognize, some time must elapse. If we alone were concerned such a question need not trouble us. I can never be yours more truly than I am at the present; but just as one dresses oneself in order to go into the street, so, if our relationship is to be shown to the world eventually, it would be an outrage not to dress it in the world's prescribed formalities. With me, then, the practical question is this. How, till this is done, can we best remain together? Shall I tell you what I have thought of?"

"Tell me."

"Do you remember how often I have talked to you about Italy? If we find it suits the children, shall we travel for some months there—say till the winter? This could be done without causing the least remark. Whenever it was desirable, we might stay at different hotels. There need be no division between us, except to the outer eye; and if we are only wise in choosing our times and seasons, we need encounter no eye that would have any interest in observing us. What do you say, Irma? Speak to me. Tell me your opinion."

"Oh," she said at last, "it is all too delightful. Only, Bobby,—I wonder if you will understand me,—I don't feel that just yet it is right even to think of it."

"Never mind," he answered. "Think of it when you like. I dare say we are none of us in a condition to travel yet; and meanwhile, whilst we rest here, I will remember I am your child, and afterwards, as long as you wish it, you must remember that I am your brother."

She laid her hand on his, and her eyes were like skies unclouding. Suddenly both grew aware again of what had been escaping their senses—the rustle of the leaves, the sharp singing of birds, and all the life of a summer not yet out of its childhood. The happiness which they had known before on that very spot, rose out of the mosses, tingling in the air around them. The past began, like a slowly swinging censer, to scent up into the present its clouds of perfumed memory.

The same evening after dinner, as they sat together in the twilight, the charm of the future began to operate on their fancies, and the scenes glimmered before them which they hoped soon to visit.

"Have you forgotten," she said—"I have not forgotten it

—the momentary picture of Italy with which once you stirred and dazzled me? I remember your very words—boats gliding on lakes with sails like the breasts of swans, the marble peaks of the pure Carrara mountains, rising out of violet mists, and glittering in a sky of primrose colour, the notes of the Angelus trembling from craggy villages amongst the Apennines.”

“Yes,” said Grenville; “we will see them all. We will sit together above Como, in an arbour of which I know, whilst the banksia roses round us are fretting the purple twilight.”

“And I,” she said, “will not trouble you with questions about our past. Whatever we ought to think of it we shall learn to think. Our united lives will teach us.”

This programme began to be realized sooner than they had dared to anticipate. The whole party, Grenville especially, recovered strength rapidly; and matters connected with the estate of her late husband made it desirable for Mrs. Schilizzi to go for a few days to Vienna. Grenville accompanied her, now without anxiety. One morning when, as usual, he came to her apartment, to breakfast with her, she met him with a look of excitement, holding in her hand a letter.

“What do you think?” she exclaimed. “I have only now learnt it. Paul never told me. I have just heard it from our lawyer. It was Paul who bought your house, that he might sell it to Prince—— of ——. The Prince, or the Queen, or the nation—I don’t understand these things—will give twenty thousand pounds for it more than Paul gave you.”

In blank surprise, Grenville sank down on a sofa, saying nothing for a moment, but staring at Mrs. Schilizzi. Then the recollection came back to him of Mr. Schilizzi in the train, and his glowing account of his operations in country properties. “Tell me,” he said, presently, “all about it. With regard to that and to other things, let us try and understand the situation.”

“So far as I can gather,” he wrote that night in his diary, “we could if we liked return to my old home and live there. Unless it is resold—and there is no obligation to sell it—it will entirely go to Irma, my little step-daughter; but it seems that, for her life, it would belong to Irma—my own Irma. I am glad of this, and she is glad also. We are glad we might

live there, for this reason—because thus we are enabled to refuse to do so. We will touch nothing of Paul Schilizzi's money, except in so far as we touch it for the distinct benefit of his children. My old home shall never be my home again through him. We both agree about this point. Our feelings are perhaps fantastic. Never mind. This is our determination. We can neither of us really believe that we have done that man a wrong; but we do feel that we never could receive from him any benefits. Irma's business here is done, and we start to-morrow. We start for Italy. It seems to me an unbelievable dream. We go to Vicenza first, and I think then to Siena. We shall see. The world is all before us.

"This evening Irma asked me if I had read her diary. I said I had not. I said that I felt as if to do so would seem like implying a doubt of her. She said, 'No—no. I am pleased that you should feel that; but indeed you need not. I know that you don't doubt me; but I have been thinking over the past, and I am horrified to see how capricious and cruel I must have appeared to you. You *have* thought me capricious and cruel. Don't deny it. I know you have. Hush—don't answer me yet. Let me go on speaking. You don't think me so now—you don't any longer doubt me; but as to the past, I am certain you do not understand me. You will if you read my diary. That was why I sent it to you, and therefore, for my sake, read it. Nothing will divide us then, I think—not even one jarring memory.'

"I told her I would read it; and we talked of other matters, but just as I was going to leave her, she came back to the subject. She spoke half shyly. 'When you read it,' she said, 'don't speak about it to me. I want to know that you have read it through as a whole; but I don't think I could bear—you see you have all my inmost thoughts there—I don't think I could bear to speak about them in detail, even to you. Do you understand me?' I said I did; and I did. I shall open her volume for the first time to-night; and each night during our travels, when I am alone in my own room, I shall read a little."

The day following, as had been arranged, they all started for Italy; and he studied the diary night by night as he had proposed to himself. With regard to one point, however, he found himself deviating from the course he had anticipated.

Instead of reading the volume straight through, he found himself instinctively turning to the records of those days when her conduct had so wounded and troubled him, when the ideal he had formed of her had become so distorted, and almost lost, and when his heart had been seared with a pain, the smart of which he remembered still. And here in her diary he at last found complete healing.

During all that time in London, when he had felt her to be treating him so ill, he discovered that in reality all her hours had been full of him. He compared carefully his own diary with hers, for those days when her notes to him had been shortest, or her words hardest; and all the anger which he had then felt against her, with a sensation of rapture he now turned against himself, taxing himself with selfishness, with want of patience, with a stupid want of understanding, and by the shadow which he cast upon himself, making her image brighter.

The following was her diary for her first day at her mother-in-law's. It was addressed to himself, as it was on so many other occasions.

"What weariness all these hours have been without you! Now you are no longer with me, the sun seems extinguished, and all the air is winter. I have been to-day with my lawyer. How hateful and perplexing all my business seemed! Had you been with me to help me, everything would have been different. And how am I to see you? My mother-in-law is preparing to map out every minute for me. She is making engagements for me; she is going to drive me out in her brougham, with both the windows closed, whilst she sits wrapped up in a rug, her feet on a hot bottle, a tract in one hand, and what she calls her vinaigrette in the other. I can't help laughing a little. I must do my best to be patient. But I feel this—that she is spinning round me a spider's web of circumstances, which will entangle me like a fly, and keep me away from you. I wonder if you care as much as I do? I have written to you to-night, for there is one hour when I may be able to see you to-morrow; and yet even about that I cannot feel quite certain. I may have to put you off at the last moment; and I shall hardly sleep to-night owing to this wretched uncertainty. But still I mean to be patient. For your sake I wish to be as good as I can be; and you must help me. I trust you."

In the next day's diary Grenville read this. It was her account of his visit to her in Mrs. Budden's drawing-room. How different from his own impression of it!

"I saw you this afternoon—but rather it was not seeing you—or rather it was only seeing you. It was like seeing water, and only seeing it, when one is thirsty. I don't know what I talked about; I have quite forgotten; but I know that I said nothing, and could say nothing, that I wanted to say. And you thought me so stupid, and you will soon cease to care for me. I know you will—how can you help it when I am so stupid? You will leave me; and then what will happen to me? And every day now it will be harder for me to meet you."

Then during the next few days came entries such as this—

"Without you I am like a child lost in the streets. The people round me bewilder me as if they were ghosts; and when I do see you for a few troubled minutes, you are sometimes displeased and rough with me—at least I think so. And then in answer I think I sometimes speak sharply. But I hardly know what I have said. To speak to you as I want to speak seems hopeless now—impossible.

"The people round me seem to have claws clutching at me. I can hardly get away from them. My mother-in-law, or a sister of hers, or somebody, always wants to come with me wherever I go. And somehow I can't even write to you. All day long things are collecting in my mind which I want to pour out to you; but when the time comes to write them, I find that I can't put them on paper. I have sat this evening with a sheet before me, and with a pen in my hand, thinking pages and pages to you; and then it has ended in my writing only these miserable lines in my diary."

Then came this. It was dated on one of the days when she had seemed to him most heartless and frivolous.

"I was looking this morning at some of the jewels Paul gave me. If I could, I would sell them, and give the money to a charity, or else give it to him. But to do neither is possible. I wish to render Paul whatever service I can, but to accept nothing from him. What I must do is this—when-ever he desires me to wear any of these things, I will wear them; but only then: and I shall regard them then merely as his livery, which I humiliate myself by wearing to please him, Bobby, I once took pleasure in all these pretty things. For your sake now I hate them.

"This morning I had two hours to myself. I couldn't write to you, and arrange to meet you ; so I went instead and saw some poor people near here. I sat with them, and talked to their children, and arranged to do whatever I could to help them. You would wish me to do things like these, wouldn't you? I know how kind you yourself are ; I know how much you feel for the unhappiness and pain of others. I felt all the while that I was doing what you would wish. Is it not strange how things out of the New Testament come home to one sometimes with a quite new application? This morning I said several times, 'Insomuch as I am doing it to the least of these, I am doing it to you.' For you do wish me to be good, don't you?"

Then came her record of his visit to her own house at Hampstead ; and then of their excursion to his house in the country ; and then of their days at the little Suffolk watering-place. During this period he had felt that he understood her. There was no apparent alienation to be explained away ; but he came across one passage which struck him for this reason—that it showed how closely, in some particulars, her experiences had resembled his own.

"I can never," she wrote, "be sure of the continuity of my own mood. Generally I feel secure of a sense that I am right in belonging to you ; and all through these days in London I have felt, night and morning, that could you only be always with me, my heart would have perfect peace. But now, at this quiet little place by the sea, where nothing disturbs our intercourse, I have been troubled and shaken. I have been troubled to-day—but at this moment I am calm again. When you talk to me my misgivings go. They go when I think of all that you have sacrificed for me, and of all the high thoughts in me, which you have done your best to encourage. And yet—oh, Bobby—what a strange thing is the conscience ! It often seems to me like the ghost of Hamlet's father, its voice coming now from one place, now from another quite opposite, as if it were urging on me two different sets of arguments. What a lot of books—scientific books—I have read about it, long before I thought that, for my own peace of mind, I should ever have to consider how far they were true. I believe, however, that I am really learning one thing which I had often heard before, but never realized ; and that is not what conscience is, but what a woman is. A woman can

appreciate reasoning as well as a man can ; but it is not by reasoning that she sees her own way in perplexity. I can reason, and say that I am breaking some ties which, if everybody broke, all society would be ruined. But then, again, comes an answer—an answer I learnt from you—that what we do depends upon what we are ; and that if all society were as true as you and I are, and if all couples loved as well, society would not be ruined, but would be saved. Again, I can say that I am making Paul miserable by giving to you what is due to him alone. But again comes the answer, that this misery is merely imaginary—merely the creation of some conventional formula ; for I am merely giving to you what to him is wholly valueless. So too I can apply to myself—and I have applied them as if I were flagellating myself—all those names such as ‘impure’ ‘degraded’ ‘faithless’ ‘shameless,’ and so on, which are always the first stones cast at women like me. But against names like these I hardly care to defend myself. I know them to be so inapplicable that they hardly cause me uneasiness. All they can do is to turn me away from argument, and drive me back to my own consciousness of myself ; and in spite of every argument this still remains the same, like a flame inside a lantern which no wind can agitate. And then I know with a woman’s absolute certainty—with a certainty which I would die for—that my heart is not impure, that I am not shameless or degraded, that my one aspiration is not to be faithless, but to be faithful, and that in spite of the many selfishnesses which sully one’s daily life, I long to consecrate my whole being to you. I feel, as I write this, as if I were being lifted off my feet by some wind of the spirit, and as if the voice of the spirit were inspiring me. What nonsense that would sound to any one else reading it ; but to me it is full of meaning. Words—words ! where are you ? Come and help me. Make me intelligible. I don’t know what to say. If a rose has blossomed I can see it. If an aloe has blossomed I can see it. Well—here’s another thing I can see—I can see that under your influence, Bobby, I myself have blossomed. It’s a fact. I know it to be one. Why should I vex myself by insisting on it any farther ? As for arguments, they must play at see-saw if they will. They will sometimes make me feel that there is nothing to be said for us ; sometimes that there is nothing to be said against us. But whatever is proved, oh, you who have chosen me, and

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whom I have chosen, I know that I am devoted to you ; and when I trust to my consciousness and my instincts, I feel that loving you was the first right thing I ever did, and that all hope and all elevation is contained in it."

From this he turned to her record of the subsequent days at Lichtenbourg, during which she had sometimes seemed to him to be so cruel a mystery.

"You are coming to-morrow," she had written on the night before his arrival. "I long for you ; but my aunt is here, and I feel she is watching me, just as I felt about my mother-in-law. It is only a fancy, I know ; but it constantly takes possession of me and tortures me. Oh, come, come quickly ! And yet I hardly know whether I most long for your coming or dread it. I can't write any more. Yes—come ! I long for you."

A day or two later she changed her form of expression. She no longer addressed him, but spoke of him in the third person. "My aunt," she wrote, "gets on so well with him. If there were nothing to conceal, how happy we might all of us be together ! Suppose he and I were nothing but friends, mere affectionate friends, I should not feel the perverse shrinking from him that I experience now sometimes."

Next day she continued, "What nonsense I wrote yesterday ! If he were merely a friend, he wouldn't be mine, and mine only ; and that is what I want him to be. If I were merely one of his friends—even the most valued of them—would he, as he has done, have given his life to me ? No—no, Bobby ! I want your whole sole love—your complete self—and I want to give you mine. And yet—sometimes you make me hate you, because you have made me love you so. I wonder if you can guess at all that is going on within me—how sometimes my nerves are strained and tortured ! It is all for your sake, and because I can't be false to you."

Then, a little later, came her mention of the arrival of her husband. "I didn't know," she wrote, "how his presence would affect me. I had a fantastic fear that it might fill me with some horrible compunction—that I might see myself suddenly as a criminal. The result was quite different. To my surprise my self-reproaches were all set at rest. Paul seemed further from me when I was face to face with him, than he had seemed when he was away at Smyrna."

Next day she continued, "I have been rather uneasy.

That Paul is a person capable of being wronged by any bestowal I may be pleased to make of my affections, I cannot believe—I cannot realize. All facts are against it. I know it is not the case. But this knowledge of mine is traversed and troubled by what I suppose is some inherited instinct, or some echoes of opinions and judgments which I have heard ever since my childhood; and these opinions and judgments go hammering away in my mind, stupidly condemning me, and condemning me unheard. For hours together they sometimes make me unhappy; but then when I turn from them to myself, whom they are condemning, I see how absurdly false they are—how they are condemning what they do not know. I attributed them just now to an inherited instinct. I have another inherited instinct, and it is of a much deeper kind. It is the instinct to pray. I don't say prayers in so many words, exactly. I can't use the phrases of ecclesiastical Christianity, for I am not living according to its laws; but I kneel down for a minute or two, each night and morning, and, with an odd inconsistency, I cross myself. I do it as a sign that I long for and love goodness—that I want my soul to grow upwards. How many good people would say that for a woman in my situation this must be hypocrisy! But it is not. I can say no more than that. It is not."

Then came a day or two with entries like the following.

"Paul has taken to eyeing me in a possessive manner. I know the reason. He wants to make me feel that I am his absolute property, and to let others see that I am. He even seems to think that he has some property in my affection, and that at any moment he can call on me to exhibit this, so as to let him see, or let others see, that I am still keeping it for him. Oh, fool, fool! What does he think a woman is made of? Is a wife a husband's plaything? Has she no life of her own? If I gave way to my own natural impulses, how I should burn with indignation and rebellion! But I want to restrain myself. For the sake of that love of which I long to make myself worthy, I will be humble to Paul, and patient with him. I will fetch and carry for him. I will not lose my temper. I will go with him to these odious races.

"Bobby—I do all this, I leave you, I seem to neglect you, really because I am so devoted to you. Will you understand? I don't think you do. And how should you? I am so perverse. When I meet you just now, it is impossible for me to

say much to you ; and I feel angry for that very reason, and vent my anger on you.

"Last night you were cold and distant. I was, I know ; but I didn't want you to be. If you could only have a little more penetration, you would see that when in speaking to you I have seemed most hard and odious, I have really been longing to cling to you, and tell you I was your own."

Presently came this passage, which, as Grenville read it, sent the blood to his cheeks.

"I have driven you away ; I have told you to go. I couldn't help it. I should have gone mad if you had stayed—at least I thought so. And now you are gone. Till I see you again I can write no more diary. Already I want you back."

Then followed this, written during his visit to the Pasha.

"I said I would write no more till I saw you, till I had you with me again. But I must write. I must ease my mind somehow. When are you coming back ? Everything is blank without you. Paul is rather poorly. I have been nursing him as much as he would let me. That at all events was a duty. But he would let me do little. He preferred the company of—what shall I call her?—my rival—one of my twenty rivals : and most of my time I am alone. Oh, Bobby—what can I do without you ? You will come back soon, won't you ? I don't know how to write to you."

Next day she wrote, "The children are both ill, as well as Paul ; so I could hardly see you now, dear, even if you were here. All day I have been by their little beds ; but all through my care my heart is aching for want of you. I believe you will come soon ; for cruelly as I must seem to have treated you, I believe in you so entirely. I am weary in body, and sick in mind. Come to me."

Having studied these passages, and others relating to the same period, Grenville felt that his principal right to the secrets of the volume was gone. All of her conduct that had pained and troubled him was explained. He had felt, whilst reading her account even of this, as if he were treading on sacred ground ; and he shrank from prying into these earlier parts which referred to the period before his perplexities had begun. Her whole life lay before him defenceless upon the pages, which she had put into his hands so guilelessly. But still, that he might not seem to be undervaluing her confidence, or missing anything which she might really wish him to know, there was

no part which finally he did not glance at ; whilst one passage—it caught his eye and he lingered over it—dwelt in his mind, deepening the meaning of the whole.

“The more I think of it, the more terrible does marriage, as conventionally regarded, seem to me for some women. I see this at times with such a ghastly clearness, that I wonder at its escaping any one. For the women I am thinking of, there ought to be a new marriage service written ; and the words of it, which need be very few, should say what it really means for them. So far as all their highest sympathies are concerned, and all their capacities for affection other than that which is maternal, their marriage service might be comprised in Christ’s curse on the fig-tree—‘Let no fruit henceforward grow on thee for ever !’ And of many such women it indeed might be truly said, ‘How soon is the fig-tree, which was cursed, withered away !’”

He was closing the volume, intending next day to return it to her, when he noticed something more scribbled on the fly-leaf. The writing was in pencil, and very faint. It was written in haste evidently, as if under some sudden impulse. With a little trouble he deciphered it.

“Let my thoughts mix with yours, till they are like a single tissue of interlacing nerves, quivering with a single and yet a twofold consciousness—only divided so far that we each may know ourselves united.

“I am not an angel—I am a woman—with a woman’s passions, with a woman’s weakness, and with a woman’s strength—and all these are yours. Every corpuscle of my blood is yours, to throb for your sake, or to be shed for it.

“Sometimes troubles, sometimes temper, may have clouded my feeling for you ; but I have loved you all the same. The rich miser, when he thinks that he does not care for money, is like me when I have thought that I did not care for you.”

CHAPTER XXXIV.

GRENVILLE finished his reading on the night of their arrival at Vicenza. They had travelled leisurely, stopping three times on the road ; and each night before he composed himself to sleep, he had studied her pages by the light of two opaque hotel candles.

Every doubt with regard to her that had ever troubled him was now not only dispelled, but had given place to a confidence even deeper than anything he had known before. Faith was lost in vision. As he put the volume down, he was lying in a great gaunt bed, above which was an ultramarine ceiling. The walls of the room were festooned with flowers in rough distemper ; the floor was tiled, and dingy from want of washing. Musty smells, like ghosts, haunted the curtains. But as he closed his eyes the whole place was like paradise. He was here in that very town where he had renounced one hope, and he was to awake to the realization of another, for which, almost unconsciously, that renunciation had been made.

They were staying at different hotels. In the morning he went to hers. Sunshine and happiness impregnated all the air. Her breakfast-table was bright with flowers, which she had just bought herself from some brown girls on the pavement. To her Vicenza was a world of wonders. It was a dream come true. They wandered through the streets ; they explored the old-world palaces. Love was the warp of life for her, and these new experiences were the woof, and together they produced a surface prismatic with shifting colour. Long excursions were made by them, from which they returned by moonlight. The voices of singing peasants melted into the warm air. Grenville thought of the villa which, on a damp, well-remembered morning, he had visited alone. He learnt by accident that it was to be let for a certain period. They went together and saw it. Both for a moment forgot that they were not yet married, and almost in the same breath proposed taking it till the autumn. They smiled presently at their forgetfulness. At a little distance there was a small white house, on whose red tiles the air could be seen shimmering. It was evidently unoccupied. Grenville spoke to the servant who

was in attendance on them ; and then turning to Mrs. Schilizzi, said—

“ I have solved the difficulty. That shall be my home. You and the children shall be here.”

The project was carried out, like the fulfilment of yet another dream. No situation could have suited the children better. The air was fresh for them even during the heat of summer, and the Alps in the background sharpened their spears of snow. The halls of the villa, with their gorgeous hollow ceilings, and walls over every inch of which the brush of Paul Veronese had left its wake of colour, were tenanted by perpetual coolness ; and seen through a vista of pillars and arched doorways, Neptunes and Tritons, grouped against a garden wall, were pouring out fans of water, whose outlines dissolved in spray.

The life which the little party led in this enchanted abode was simplicity itself. Their dishes and their wines were all redolent of the country ; and excepting for the absence of one national flavour, and for a care and cleanliness in the cooking, were such as would have been grateful and familiar to any Italian farmer. Grenville, who was a good linguist, became easily acquainted with the peasantry ; and Mrs. Schilizzi was soon active amongst them in many a work of kindness. Grenville, to his great delight, was again made conscious of this—that she was as sensitive to the sight of suffering as she was to the sight of beauty, and that compassion as well as passion could hang in shadow under her eyelashes. Within-doors they resumed their former studies and discussions, whilst he began himself take part in the education of the children. The only shadow on their lives—and indeed it was not menacing—was the fact that he, although no longer an invalid, had but partly recovered the strength which he had lost so suddenly by his illness. This had, however, one important result on his conduct. It compelled him, whatever might have been his own inclinations in the matter, to definitely give up, for the present at all events, all prospects of that career which had promised to be so useful and so brilliant. But as the weeks went on, he and Mrs. Schilizzi both began to feel a need for him, not indeed of a career, which is action regarded as throwing lustre on the actor, but of action regarded as a duty—as a debt owing to others.

“ I think,” he said one day to her, “ that there must be a

mass of facts, and also a few suggestions, relative to the work at Constantinople, which I could put into a clearer form than they are likely to be in at present, and so smooth the way for X——, who will take my place. I will write to Downing Street, and propose that I do this here."

"And me," she said—"you must let me help you—unless perhaps I should be a hindrance."

"You shall help me," he answered; "but you will find it hard, dry work."

"For that very reason," she exclaimed, earnestly, "I shall like it all the better. Do you remember that sense we both had of a debt owing to Paul? I believe now that it was a debt not so much owing to him, as to something represented by him, to which I can give no name; and that same something is represented now for us by the world—by the children first, and by every one we can benefit afterwards."

"You remind me," said Grenville, "of what our friend the doctor said to me during that journey on which I first met your husband. You say that the something to which we owe ourselves is a something to which you can give no name. The doctor said—I remember his very words—'In the present state of our knowledge, religion cannot express itself in any definite form which knowledge will allow us to tolerate.' And then, Irma, he went on, 'All the same I maintain that man is only human because of his longing for what is more than human.' You and I have this longing in common, and we must try to satisfy it not by love alone, but by work."

"I like this," she said, when the documents for which he wrote had arrived from Downing Street, and after several weeks of diligence she had helped him in bringing his dry labour to a completion.

"Here," he said, "is a letter I have had from the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Read it, and you will see that our efforts have not been vain."

It was, however, well that they had not been longer or harder; for it was evident that for the present he could bear no farther strain. "You must now," she said to him, "rest yourself by a change of duty. You must go on educating me, and I shall help you better afterwards."

An eminent doctor, who had come to see him from Venice, like Mrs. Schilizzi, also prescribed rest, by which he explained himself to mean change of air and scene, and the excitement

of any interest involving no mental exertion. Their tenancy of the villa was by this time nearly expired ; and they removed shortly to a beautiful spot on the lake of Como, spending their lives together, though lodging under different roofs. Having remained here for some time, they proceeded south to Siena, doing most of the journey not by rail, but by road, in two old-fashioned travelling carriages, which they were able to buy at Milan.

Grenville knew Italy fairly well. Its general aspect, at all events, could not be said to be new to him ; but in Mrs. Schilizzi's company everything was a fresh surprise. Everything seemed to be yielding to him some unexpected incredible music, like an instrument touched suddenly by the hands of some inspired master. The golden and purple pencillings of light and shade on the mountains had a colour and keenness he had never known before. The pilgrimage chapels, shining high on their rocky perches, stirred his mind and hers like the mysterious smell of incense ; the heart of the twilights deepened like purple flowers unfolding ; and all the passion and romance of the storied ages seemed to be floating on the transfigured waters of Como. Siena even more than Vicenza astonished Mrs. Schilizzi, with its mellow girdle of walls, and its narrow climbing streets, where the shops lurked under the shadow of arches brown with history. Day by day they took long drives into the country—that country of hills and valleys, which is bounded by the undulating curves of far-off lilac-coloured mountains. They visited strange walled villages, where the towers of ruined castles stood like hollow trees, with ivy on their broken outlines. They climbed the hills crowned by the towers of San Gimignano. They found their way to villas built by Cardinals of the Renaissance, which hid their fountains and statues in forests of dark-green ilex. Constantly too they would betake themselves to the great Siennese cathedral, moving softly over its pavements of pictured marble, breathing an atmosphere which was charged with prayer and silence, and in which marble at the spell of prayer seemed everywhere to have flowered into life. Mrs. Schilizzi, actuated by some impulse which she could not analyze, would often seat herself on one of the countless chairs, and then sink upon her knees. "In that cathedral, I feel," she said once to Grenville, "as if all human emotions were passing through it, on the way to heaven." One thing that struck both of them was this—that

the children, who often begged to be taken there with them, seemed to be sensible of some kindred feeling.

Thus occupied, the days and the months wore on. Autumn gradually died into early winter ; and at last the time arrived when, considering all the circumstances, it appeared to both of them that, without indecorum, they might be married. The ceremony was performed at Nice, where they went and settled themselves for the purpose ; and meanwhile they had bought, for a sum absurdly small, a villa above the Mediterranean, situated on a well-known promontory, where land has come since to be sold by the square yard, but where then there was complete seclusion, and where a foreign purchaser was a wonder. Compared with the villa of which they had been tenants in the summer, their present abode was humble and even rude ; but the paintings on some of the ceilings were not devoid of beauty ; the rooms were well-proportioned ; and by the time it was ready to receive its new possessors, though the stucco outside was scaling off the walls with age, the interior had an air of refined and even dignified luxury. The children and the nurses had been sent there a few days before them ; so they felt that the place had become a home already, when they started for it from Nice, the moment the marriage was completed. On the Nice platform, as they were waiting for the arrival of their train, Grenville heard his name pronounced in a sonorous voice ; and he suddenly saw before him the face of Sir Septimus Wilkinson, shining and swelling with the wish to be intimate and congratulatory. At a little distance was his daughter, whom also Grenville recognized.

"How are you !" exclaimed Sir Septimus, seizing Grenville's hand. "My daughter and I were saying we were sure it was you. We of course had heard of your engagement, but we weren't aware you were married. I was telling my daughter that that must be Lady Evelyn. God bless my soul, I was saying—What are the French mademoiselles compared with the young ladies of our own English nobility ?"

"Allow me," said Grenville with ready presence of mind, "allow me to introduce you to my wife. But I fear you have been misinformed as to one point. Mrs. Grenville's nobility is Hungarian rather than English."

Sir Septimus felt that his mistake had been corrected with great delicacy ; and susceptible as he was to the claims of female beauty, and full of a belief in Grenville as a man who

would do well for himself, he left the bride and bridegroom, for whose start he obsequiously waited, believing the bride to be the heiress of some great continental magnate, who had only dropped her title out of deference to English prejudice. Grenville shrewdly guessed what was passing in the good man's mind ; and the thought of the lot in life which the world expected of him, deepened his sense of the value of that other lot which he had chosen.

It is never safe to say of a man, before his death, that he was happy. In certain cases it is safe to say so after it. Not many months later it might have safely been said of Grenville, who even now, though he did not know it, carried the seeds of death in him. Never, since the illness from which he had suffered at Lichtenbourg, had he been what he was previously. His full strength never had returned to him. An attack of the same kind, due to some miniature imprudence, laid prostrate for the second time a constitution already weakened ; and by gradual stages, as day sinks into night, his life sank through a painless twilight into death. Meanwhile, however, time had been given him for realizing the fullness and depth of the existence he was so soon to leave. He often, without fear of wearying her by repetition, applied to his acquaintance with her what Keats said of his first knowledge of Homer—

"So felt I as some watcher of the skies,
When some new planet swims into his ken."

And she knew—for the whole course of his conduct showed it—that he was speaking without exaggeration. Her feelings were no less deep than his ; though the full expression of them in words came only after his ears were deaf. During his illness and weakness she nursed him with most unceasing care. "The more I can do for you," she said, "the more devoted I am to you." But that he was actually going to leave her she never realized, and indeed hardly feared, till one afternoon, in the earnestness with which he spoke to her, she felt a sudden foreshadowing of it.

"As I lie here helpless," he said, "I think of many things which had sunk out of sight beneath the surface of my happy life with you—a surface which has reflected heaven. They have been coming to the surface again, as I believe drowned bodies do. Don't start, Irma : I am going to say nothing painful. Let me tell you," he went on slowly. "Perhaps,

dear, I may never have another opportunity. The most wretched state in which a human creature can be is that in which it condemns what it is resolved to continue doing—especially when this seems the one best thing in life. You and I have both of us escaped that state, by refusing to accept the condemnation with which the letter of the law would have crushed us, and appealing to the spirit, by which the letter is slowly changed, and which has acquitted us. But lately, those old prejudices which we imbibed with our mother's milk, and on which all our affections, all our most sacred feelings, have been raised up, and trained like vines on trellis-work—those old prejudices have been coming back to me; and against my reason, against my inmost conscience, they have been trying to betray my peace and fortitude with a kiss. They have tried to ulcerate my memories with the poison of imputed wickedness. But they have not succeeded. I want to tell you that they have not, in case that ever hereafter you should go through the same trial. I have a claim now," he went on, smiling, "to speak with authority on the matter which I never had before."

She looked at him speechless, full of appealing fear. He could not endure the sight of such piteous suffering. He forced a laugh, and spoke trying to reassure her.

"I only mean," he said, "that when one is ill, a kind of clairvoyance comes to one, so I thought I might as well speak to you whilst the prophet's vision possessed me. By the way, Irma, there is another thing I have been thinking about—the children, and how to educate them. Do you remember them in the cathedral at Siena? I often think of them there, and of the way in which the prayers and the music touched them. How can we teach them except in terms of the religion by which we were taught ourselves? It seems hard to tell them things which to us are truths no longer; and yet these fictions are sponges still soaked with truth. Irma, you must settle what is best. I can speak no more; I am tired."

Later that day a doctor came to visit him. When the interview was over Grenville said to his wife, "I have had what to me is a piece of welcome news. To-morrow morning I want to go out early, and see the world at sunrise. If it is not chilly, and if I take proper precautions, the doctor tells me I may do so. I want to go to the beach, close by the grove of stone-pines. It is only a fancy of mine; but if you will come with me, perhaps you will understand it."

The spot he had indicated was just below the garden, and could be reached by a winding road, practicable for a light carriage. In the hush of the morning, when the light was a white dimness, a little pony-chaise stood at the villa door; and Grenville and his wife crawled in it down the steep descent, whose rough zigzags brought them close to the sea. In the universal stillness the noise even of that light carriage was startling. Every stone which the pony's hoofs loosed had been audible separately as it rattled down the hill. But on reaching the grove of pines, where the ground was soft and velvety, one sound alone came to their listening ears; and this was the long sigh and the falling murmur of the waves.

They stationed themselves on the margin of the grove, just where the sands bordered it. The air was fresh with the night which had hardly left it; and the darkness of the night was still in the solemn blueness of the sea. Before them for miles and miles were the curves of the vast bay, ending in a horn of mountains, which were now half lost in mist; and along the sea-line, and over the high hill-country inland, white houses were sprinkled on purple and gray shadow. But all as yet was sleeping. Even the waves fell like a dreamer moving on his pillow. Nothing was awake but smells of brine and dew.

"Let me taste the world," he said in a low voice to her. "Let me inhale the morning. Ah—there is life—life, everywhere. Soon you will see it waking. Look, look!" he exclaimed, as an arrow of rosy gold shot through the air and struck on a crest of foam. And now a change came. Far away the mountains began to flush; coloured vapours steamed out of distant valleys; and wreaths of smoke from one place and another were seen rising in columns of shining silver.

She felt it difficult to speak. She could only look at him anxiously.

"Did you ever," he asked her presently, "hear a story of Mirabeau—I dare say untrue, like most stories of death-beds—how he told them, as he was dying, to throw the windows open, and said, 'Sprinkle me with rose-buds, crown me with flowers, that I may so enter on the eternal sleep'? I think that was rather theatrical; but still I can feel a meaning in it. I should like to be buried where flowers might sprinkle my grave—in our own garden; I once told you the place; and

not in lead or wood, but in a wicker coffin which at once will give the earth to me."

"Hush! hush!" she said. "Don't. Oh, Bobby, you frighten me."

"Don't be frightened," he answered. "Ah, there is life, life everywhere. And you are here, Irma, who are more than life. Irma," he went on presently, "I wonder if you will remember, dear, what I said to you yesterday about the children? Don't answer. You will—yes, I am sure you will. My thoughts wander a little. It's something else I must try to tell you now. I said, you remember, that as to our case of conscience, I could speak with an authority I never possessed before. What I meant was this. My convictions are now being put to the last test—the test of how they look to eyes that will soon be dying! I see things now from within, not from without, and I know that whatever may be said as to the rules or laws we have broken, we have been truer to their spirit in our breach of them than half the world is in their observance. Armed with that thought, I am afraid of one thing only—not of having loved you, but of leaving you. Don't cry, dear, and don't look so scared at me. Our lot is one, now and hereafter also. I have done nothing for you that you would not have done for me; and it is for your sake I am dying. God!—love!—Irma!—I don't know how to express myself—I have been true to you."

"Bobby," she exclaimed, "what—what is the matter with you? Are you ill?—are you worse? Let us go to the house instantly. Lean back a little—you will breathe more easily."

Before the day was ended he breathed neither with ease nor difficulty.

One further sorrow, and one only, was reserved for her. This was her own parting from her children, whom she left to go to Grenville, and sleep by him under the same flowers. Meanwhile what her life owed to his, and what it could not lose even with his loss, may be gathered from the fact that after she was left alone—alone except for her children—her chief solace and most constant occupation when not teaching them, was studying the papers and diaries in which his devotion to herself was recorded, and in comparing her own with them. Close to his resting-place in the garden was a pavilion overgrown with creepers. Here she would sit for hours,

whilst the children were playing near her ; and would re-read what he had written, repeating aloud his phrases. "Where shall I find him in all this boundless universe?" This was her constant question ; and again and again in a vague way she answered it, by certain words of his, which she had written down the night he said them. "Think of the worlds forming, think of the worlds shining, and the darkened suns and systems mute in the night of time. To us, to us, what can it all say, more than the sea says to a rainbow in one tossed bubble of foam? And yet to me it seems that it says something. It asks, can it have no meaning for us, seeing that we are born of it? And can we be out of harmony with it, seeing that it speaks to us now?"

Gradually a plan shaped itself in her mind, to which ultimately she gave effect. Piecing together her own diary to his, and using also letters and other papers, she formed the whole into something that resembled a coherent history ; to which, when she had finished it, she prefixed the following dedication—

"TO THE SOLE AND ONLY BEGETTER OF THIS VOLUME.

"You by whose side I shall lie, in a wicker coffin like yours, with whose bones my bones shall mingle, and whose flesh I shall meet again in the sap of the violets above our grave, I have done my best, whilst waiting to come back to you in death, to perpetuate in this book neither your life nor mine, but that one single life in which both our lives were fused. Were my power as a writer equal to my love as a woman, that life should live in these pages, as it lived and breathed once in our now lonely bodies. I would make it live—all of it ; I would keep back nothing ; for perfect love casts out shame. But if any one should think that I ought to blush for what I have written, I should be proud if, in witness of my love for you, every page of it were as crimson as a rose."

THE END.

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